

Embracing Evangelicalism and Anabaptism:

The Mennonite Brethren in Canada

in the Late Twentieth Century

by

Patricia Janzen Loewen

A thesis

Submitted to

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

The University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

March 24, 2000



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**Embracing Evangelicalism and Anabaptism: The Mennonite Brethren
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Patricia Janzen Loewen

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
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Master of Arts**

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PREFACE

It is with sincere gratitude that I wish to acknowledge those people whose input into this thesis project was invaluable. Thank-you to Dr. H.G. Harland for his guidance. It was in one of our first conversations together that Dr. Harland's comments concerning the Mennonite Brethren piqued my interest and started the chain of thought that led to this project. Since that time our conversations on this topic and the many suggestions he gave taught me much that was needful in this project. We did, indeed, make a good team. My thanks also go to my committee- Dr. Egil Grislis and Dr. D. Burke. Thanks also to Dr. Leo Driedger who acted as my outside advisor. The passion and interest he shared in the topic were an encouragement to me. Thank-you to Dr. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. who acted as my advisor during my first year of graduate studies and whose E-mail advice on various aspects of evangelicalism and theses projects in general were always helpful. I also enjoyed discussing my project with Harold Jantz, Abe Dueck, Royden Loewen, Waldemar Janzen, Bruce Guenther and John Redekop. I greatly appreciate their time and input. The inaccuracies that remain are my responsibility alone. I am also grateful for the assistance of a two year stipend from the Manitoba Graduate Fellowship which allowed me to concentrate on this project. I am indebted to my family- both my parents and my parents-in-law and my siblings on both sides - who supported my efforts in this venture. Finally, I would like to extend a heart-felt thank-you to Brian. In so short a space I cannot

begin to give proper credit for the ways he has encouraged me. He listened to hours of ideas and talk. He believed in my abilities. He was a friend who kept me sane through the long second year and his support was invaluable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: THREE KEY TERMS - Evangelicalism, Anabaptism and Identity	8
A. Evangelicalism	8
1. Major Characteristics of Evangelicalism.....	8
2. Evangelical Movements Important in the Shaping of the Mennonite Brethren Church.....	13
a. Pietism.....	13
b. Fundamentalism.....	16
3. Evangelical Emphases in the Mennonite Brethren Church Today.....	19
B. Anabaptism	27
1. Major Characteristics of Anabaptism.....	27
2. Brief History of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Anabaptist Movement.....	30
3. Anabaptist Emphases in the Mennonite Brethren Church Today.....	33
C. Identity	37

CHAPTER TWO: EVANGELICALISM - The Mennonite Brethren Join the EFC	40
A. Historical Background.....	40
1. Interaction With Evangelical Movements.....	41
2. The Mennonite Brethren in Canada.....	42
B. Executive Board Decision to Join the EFC.....	47
1. Nature of the Discussion.....	48
2. Limited Negative Evaluation of the EFC.....	52
C. The Influence of the <i>Herald</i>	55
1. Harold Jantz.....	55
2. John Redekop.....	57
3. Letters to the Editor.....	58
D. Comparing MB Decision with Other Mennonites.....	59
CHAPTER THREE: ANABAPTISM - Debate About Religious Heritage	62
A. Victor Adrian: Strong Ties to Evangelicalism.....	63
1. "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism"	63
2. "Anabaptist or Evangelical?"	68
B. J.A. Toews: Strong Ties to Anabaptism.....	68
1. <i>A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church</i>	70
2. "In Search of Identity"	72
3. Evaluating the Influence of J.A. Toews	74
C. J.B. Toews: A Middle Path?.....	77

CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTITY - The Name Change Debate	88
A. John Redekop: For Name Change.....	89
1. Personal Opinion Column.....	89
2. <i>A People Apart</i>	98
3. The Denomination's Response to Redekop's Arguments.....	101
B. Harold Jantz: Against Name Change.....	104
1. Editorials.....	104
2. The Denomination's Response to Jantz's Arguments.....	112
C. Comparing Redekop and Jantz.....	113
D. Voices from the Denomination.....	114
CONCLUSION.....	120
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	124

ABSTRACT

The question under investigation in this thesis is that of the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren of Canada and Evangelicalism. The Mennonite Brethren today have established many links with Evangelicalism. Furthermore, most MB's consider themselves to be Evangelicals. Yet the MB's are also part of an Anabaptist heritage. Despite an enthusiastic embrace of Evangelicalism most MB's remain unwilling to jettison the Anabaptist heritage. The tensions that arose between these two traditions within one denomination led to a crisis of religious identity.

The approach taken in this endeavor entails an historical analysis of the development of thought among the MB's during the 1970's and 1980's. The initial chapter deviates somewhat from a strictly historical methodology and outlines the definitions and framework for three key terms: Evangelicalism, Anabaptism and Identity. The work of key leaders and historians within the denomination are focused through these three conceptual lenses: the decision to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, what they perceived the role of Evangelicalism in the formation of their denomination to be and third, the question of name change.

The Mennonite Brethren embraced Evangelicalism with eagerness as they joined the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada in the early 1970's. At the same time that the MB's were confident of their Evangelical embrace, many began to wonder what role Anabaptism should play in their contemporary church. Some began to severely criticize the influences of Evangelicalism both in the past and present and others began to question the usefulness of the Anabaptist heritage. The majority wanted to keep both traditions within their religious identity.

As the Mennonite Brethren discovered, however, Anabaptism and Evangelicalism have much in common but they are not identical. On the issue of pacifism, for example, the two do not agree. Though the MB's desire to encompass both traditions it is when the two conflict that the members of the denomination must sort through their commitments to both traditions. This is a task which they continue to deal with in the present.

INTRODUCTION

In 1987, two books were published by two Canadian Mennonite Brethren authors that are of large significance for the analysis of the relationship of the Mennonite Brethren to evangelicalism. One book, *A People Apart* by John Redekop,¹ became widely known, read and discussed by the entire Mennonite Brethren Conference of Canada. The goal of Redekop's book was to persuade the Canadian Mennonite Brethren that it was necessary to change the name of their denomination. This book was the culmination of more than two decades of debate concerning their religious self-understanding. During this time the Mennonite Brethren felt that they were experiencing an *identity crisis*. This was the term they themselves gave to the deliberations which occurred in the 1970's and 1980's concerning who they were.

The other book, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* by Peter Hamm², was not widely read by the non-scholarly members of the Mennonite

¹ John H. Redekop, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1987).

² Peter Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren*

Brethren Conference. Yet, Hamm's book forms a partial analysis of the identity crisis among the Mennonite Brethren of Canada.³ Hamm argues that the social changes that the Mennonite Brethren encountered in Canada, after immigrating from Russia, were factors which contributed to the sacralization of identity among the Mennonite Brethren. In order to chart the development of thought and practice Hamm probes Mennonite Brethren attitudes on education, urbanization, occupational advancement, economic ascendancy and assimilation to North American culture. He believes that these elements were central to the ferment of self-understanding. The goal of this thesis is not to disagree with the factors which Hamm has recognized as contributors but rather its aim is to add to the list of integrants which gave rise to that which the Mennonite Brethren called their identity crisis.

In the section which deals with the Mennonite Brethren identity crisis, Hamm lists several ways in which this ethos of religious inquiry was manifested. It will be the goal of our project to demonstrate that the Mennonite Brethren's relationship to evangelicalism was integrally intertwined in the following areas which Hamm lists as manifestations of the Mennonite Brethren investigation of their religious core. According to Hamm there are several areas symptomatic of the identity crisis. Three important categories are the "reconsidering of the denominational designation", the "rediscovering [of] the heritage" and

(Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1987).

³The Mennonite Brethren were not the only Mennonite group to have undergone an identity crisis. Calvin Redekop outlines the crisis of identity which took place among the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1987, the same year as the publication of John Redekop's and Peter Hamm's books, the EMB's changed their name to Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches. The EMB's, like the Mennonite Brethren, desired to be both evangelical and Anabaptist but increasingly rejected its Anabaptist heritage. Their identity today appears to be solidly evangelical. See Calvin Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 1998).

the "reformulating [of] the theological and ethical stance"⁴ In all of these topics the Mennonite Brethren relationship to evangelicalism was a key component. While Hamm does make some mention of evangelicalism, he does not discuss a link between the identity crisis and the Mennonite Brethren embrace of evangelicalism.

Hamm states that "in the case of the present-day Canadian Mennonite Brethren...religious identity is no longer determined largely by external cultural behavioral patterns, but by association with those within a culturally pluralistic world who have a similar ideological intent."⁵ Our thesis agrees with Hamm; the Mennonite Brethren religious self-understanding has been shaped by their association with those who share much of their theological framework. The association that they have chosen is with the evangelicals of Canada. But this project also contends that this relationship, this desire, to be evangelical was in itself a contributing factor in the identity crisis. This point will be demonstrated by showing how the issue of the Mennonite Brethren's relationship to evangelicalism was integral to three of the areas wherein Hamm locates the identity crisis.

The above describes the springboard used to launch this endeavor. The following sketches the skeletal outlines of how this task will be accomplished. Thus, before delving into the ways in which the Mennonite Brethren's relationship to evangelicalism was intertwined with their identity crisis it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the terms Evangelical, Mennonite and Anabaptist. The goal of chapter one will be to define and discuss these terms and the place of the Mennonite Brethren within these groups. During

⁴Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1987), 238-239.

⁵Ibid., 237.

the debate of religious self-understanding many Mennonite Brethren questioned whether they wanted to be part of the Mennonite and Anabaptist religious heritage. Furthermore, it was often in areas where evangelicalism and Anabaptism differed that one can observe the conflict of religious self-understanding among the Mennonite Brethren. Understanding what characterizes these terms is essential to this study. Two additional points will help to set the boundaries for the entire project. Our investigation will limit itself in time; 1970's and 1980's, and space; Canada. These two decades were the period of the so-called identity crisis of the Mennonite Brethren of Canada.

Chapter two will analyze the Mennonite Brethren's relationship to Canadian evangelicalism. Beginning in the late 1960's and climaxing in 1973, the Mennonite Brethren took important steps in cultivating ties with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). This chapter will demonstrate just how firmly the Mennonite Brethren desired to be part of the larger evangelical community. Furthermore, it delineates just how confident the Mennonite Brethren were of their evangelical self-understanding. The discussion and debate, or sometimes lack of the same, within the Mennonite Brethren community concerning the decision to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada serves as a good indicator of what the Mennonite Brethren perceived their religious identity to be, specifically in regards to their relationship to evangelicalism. Hamm contends that the identity of the Mennonite Brethren is determined by their associations. If this is so, their desire to join the EFC is surely indicative of who they considered themselves to be.

It is this desire to embrace an evangelical identity that became a contributing factor in the debate of religious self-understanding. At the same time that the Mennonite Brethren embraced evangelicalism they remained reluctant to give up their Anabaptist heritage. An investigation of the areas in which the identity crisis was manifested; name change, search for heritage and reformulating of doctrine, indicates that the question of their relationship to evangelicalism created tension. Many struggled to understand how evangelicalism should interact with their Anabaptist heritage. Most were unwilling to give up either religious identity. As we move into chapters three and four we will observe at various points how many Mennonite Brethren debated the 'proper' way to integrate the two traditions.

The Mennonite Brethren's search for religious self-understanding was apparent in their investigation of their roots. Hamm titles this aspect, "rediscovering the heritage." An important part of the study of their religious past was their inquiry into their relationship to the evangelical dimension of their history. The Mennonite Brethren investigated the ways in which they were influenced and shaped by various branches of the evangelical family. Those who claimed that the Mennonite Brethren church was from its beginning a child of the evangelical movement also advocated a strong relationship to evangelicals in the present. Those who were not so sure that evangelicalism had exerted only positive influences on the Mennonite Brethren advocated a more critical but usually still accepting position in regards to their relationship to evangelicalism. Regardless of what kind of relationship the Mennonite Brethren advocated in the 1970's and 1980's the question of their

historic affiliation with evangelicalism was a key aspect in the interpretation of their heritage. These arguments form the basis of chapter three.

Hamm states that the reconsideration of the denominational designation is another area in which the identity crisis was manifested. During the 1970's and 1980's there were repeated calls for a change in the Conference name. Hamm believes that the issue of the name change was a "reflection of the [Mennonite Brethren's] struggle with identity."⁶ Chapter four explores this debate. Again, the issue of their relationship to Evangelicalism contributes to the tension. As a result of their desire to be both Anabaptist and Evangelical the Mennonite Brethren began to polarize in their views concerning the two traditions. Some began to embrace Evangelicalism and de-emphasize their Anabaptist distinctives. These members were most often those who wanted to change the denomination's name. Those who wanted to maintain support for Anabaptist concerns usually insisted that to change the name would be to capitulate to Evangelicalism. They feared a name change would destroy the Anabaptist nature of their denomination's character and result in a denomination that embraced Evangelical concerns and excluded Anabaptism.

Hamm states that the reformulating of the theological and ethical stance of the Mennonite Brethren church was marked by several features. First, it was important to the Mennonite Brethren scholars to verify that the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren church was characterized by a return to Anabaptist and New Testament principles.⁷ In chapter three we shall observe that both J.A. Toews and J.B. Toews were quite emphatic on this

⁶ Ibid., 239.

⁷ Ibid., 238.

point. They argued that the Mennonite Brethren revival movement was indeed a return to Anabaptist concerns. Second, Hamm states that the reformulating of theology was marked by a warning against foreign influences.⁸ J.A. Toews and J.B. Toews aimed much of their criticism at evangelicalism. Their observations will be discussed throughout the thesis. Their warnings, however, must not be taken as a rejection of evangelicalism. The Mennonite Brethren's desire to be both evangelical and Anabaptist created ambivalence. The period of the identity crisis was one in which they attempted, through much discussion and debate, to understand how they could be both. Their relationship to evangelicalism was indeed a significant component of their identity crisis.

⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 1

THREE KEY TERMS: EVANGELICALISM, ANABAPTISM AND IDENTITY

Before one can move into the study of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren and their relationship with evangelicalism in the 1970's and 1980's it is necessary to lay a foundation upon which such a study can stand. The goal of this chapter will be to provide definitions for the three key terms of Evangelicalism, Mennonite and identity. Pertinent and key characteristics of all three terms will be briefly discussed along with a short analysis of how the terms apply to the Mennonite Brethren.

EVANGELICALISM

Major Characteristics of Evangelicalism

It is helpful to set out a working definition of evangelicalism since scholars and evangelicals alike debate the scope of the term. Evangelicalism, most agree, is a

multi-faceted and dynamic movement. It is difficult, therefore, to create a definition that encompasses the variety of this tradition. Perhaps it is best to start with the broadest brush first. In his study of Canadian evangelicalism John Stackhouse defines evangelicalism as "a group of movements in church history with both shared concerns and actual links."¹ As we look at which movements and characteristics are generally included under the umbrella of evangelicalism the definition becomes clearer.

What movements are referred to as evangelical? Again using a broad stroke, evangelical groups are those that belong to the "broad historic stream that flows out of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, down through the Puritan and Pietist channels, and into the so-called evangelical revivals of the eighteenth-century."² Specific examples of such groups include the Puritans of England and the United States, the Pietists of Germany, Methodists, Baptists, nineteenth-century restorationists, revivalists, black Christians, holiness groups, Pentecostals,³ fundamentalists, conservative Calvinists, Adventists, Arminian conservatives, and "peace church" conservatives,⁴ among others. Such a list seems to confirm Leonard Sweet's statement that it is an *indisputable fact* that the evangelical tradition is diverse.⁵ These are some of the groups that make up the evangelical

¹ John Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 7.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert K. Johnson, "American Evangelicalism: An Extended Family," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnson (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 252.

⁵ Leonard I. Sweet, "The Evangelical Tradition in America," in *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 1.

milieu but one must look at what shared concerns these groups hold in common in order for it to make sense to list such diverse movements together under the single label of evangelical.

In general terms evangelical groups look "back to the Protestant Reformation for its emphasis upon the unique authority of Scripture and salvation through faith alone in Christ. It adds to these convictions concern for warm piety in the context of a disciplined life and for the evangelism of all people. And this group holds these convictions as so important that members of it join with Christians - often of other denominations- in order to further these concerns."⁶ Evangelical groups are those who descend from the Protestant Reformation and evangelical revivals without departing from the original, central vision of these movements as well those groups who later joined with these movements.⁷ It is the sharing of certain common beliefs that links these diverse groups together.

D.W. Bebbington's description of evangelical beliefs, often called the evangelical quadrilateral, is taken by many as a reliable summary of shared evangelical concerns.⁸ Four characteristics which Bebbington⁹ labels *conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism*, together form what he calls " a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of

⁶ John Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism*, 7. Stackhouse indicates that it is the transdenominational spirit of evangelicalism, the willingness to set aside non-essential theological distinctives in order to work with other denominations to accomplish certain tasks, which makes evangelicalism a distinct movement within the broad scope of Christianity.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ George Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour?: In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990's* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 9, 118-126, 227n.4.

⁹ Bebbington uses an initial capital letter 'e' to indicate a specific movement within the Church of England.

Evangelicalism.¹⁰ Bebbington is careful to note that these four characteristics are not unique to evangelicalism but rather the emphasis that evangelicals place on these four is what distinguishes evangelicalism.

Conversionism is the theological conviction that a person is justified by faith and that faith produces holy and moral living as well as assurance of salvation.¹¹ Evangelicals believe that a person needs to make a conscious decision to follow Jesus in order to receive justification. This decision is often called a conversion. A person who is truly converted will live a life of piety. Activism, the second aspect of the quadrilateral often stems from the strong desire that others should come to conversion. Evangelicals, therefore, devote long hours to church service. They spend much time in such activities as prayer meetings, preaching and visitation of the sick. Their desire to bring salvation to everyone results in a strong missionary spirit and a firm support of missionary endeavors. Bebbington also notes that the evangelical impulse to act has gone beyond sharing the gospel. Bebbington lists Wilberforce's quite laudable efforts to end the slave trade as merely "the most famous...attempt to enforce the ethics of the gospel"¹² by the use of law.

The third aspect of Bebbington's quadrilateral is **Biblicism**. He identifies evangelicals as people who read their Bibles devotionally and who have an extensive knowledge of what is written in the Bible. Evangelicals have always believed the Bible to be true but unlike some evangelicals of today, early evangelicals did not insist on a doctrine

¹⁰D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730's to the 1980's* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989),1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

of inerrancy and the need to interpret the Bible literally. Evangelicals of all generations do agree that the Bible is inspired by God and that all spiritual truth is to be found in it.¹³

Crucicentrism is Bebbington's label for the central role that Christ's sacrifice on the cross has in evangelical thinking. Starting with John Wesley, Bebbington lists a long roster of individuals who proclaimed the centrality of the doctrine of the cross.¹⁴ For Bebbington, "to make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system [is] to take a step away from evangelicalism."¹⁵

Though Bebbington's quadrilateral may be helpful for a basic understanding of evangelicalism, Bebbington himself cautions against a simplistic understanding of the evangelical movement. He writes: it is "clear that evangelical religion...despite the four constant elements discussed...has altered enormously over time in response to the changing assumptions of Western civilizations."¹⁶ The vast range of diverse movements that are often grouped under the umbrella term *evangelical* makes defining and characterizing the term quite difficult. D.W. Dayton is one scholar who argues that the great diversity of groups labeled evangelical has caused the term to lose whatever usefulness it might have had and should be discarded completely.¹⁷ Dayton's concerns should not be ignored. Proper use of the term evangelical should come with the understanding that evangelicals are not monolithic. Pointing to various movements and their shared beliefs is a way of

¹³ Ibid., 12-14.

¹⁴ Ibid., 14-17.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷ Donald W. Dayton, "Some Doubts About the Usefulness of the Category 'Evangelical,'" in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 245.

understanding the groups who call themselves or are called evangelical. It is not a litmus test by which one can make exact judgments on who does or does not fit into the evangelical family. Whether or not the term evangelical is useful, many Canadians identify themselves as evangelicals¹⁸ and the Mennonite Brethren, as we will investigate later, certainly see themselves as evangelicals.

Evangelical Movements Important in the Shaping of the Mennonite Brethren Church

Pietism

The above is a brief outline of evangelicalism. A more detailed look at several specific movements is necessary in the foundation of this study. One of the most important of these groups is German Pietism. The Mennonite Brethren often credit the German Pietists for starting revivals among the Russian colonies. These revivals eventually led to the formation of the Mennonite Brethren church in 1860. The Pietists were one of the first evangelical groups the Mennonites interacted with in the early nineteenth century. In the late-twentieth century, when the Mennonite Brethren investigated their relationship with other evangelicals, they looked to their interaction with German Pietism as a starting point.

J. T. McNeil describes Philip Jakob Spener's *Pia desideria* as "the first formulation and manifesto of Pietism, and the date of its appearance, March 24, 1675, may be said to mark the end of the century of Lutheran scholasticism and the beginning of the era of Pietism."¹⁹ In *Pia desideria* Spener protests the formalism of church style and the immoral

¹⁸George Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour?*, 116. Rawlyk claims that one in six Canadians are evangelical.

¹⁹John T. McNeil, *Modern Christian Movements*, revised ed. Harper Torchbooks

behavior of Lutheran clergy and laymen. Spener believed that reform was necessary and set out six requirements to bring about this change. These desiderata included the study of the Bible in group settings, private devotions and public readings, second the restoration of a spiritual priesthood in which every believer participates in prayer, good works, alms and all aspects of Christian discipline, third the emphasis on acts that demonstrate a love for one's neighbor, fourth the avoidance of controversies in the form of theological debates (something which Lutheran clergy of that day embroiled themselves in), fifth a revolution in the training of ministers so that teachers would "not only impart truth but...have truth penetrate the soul"²⁰ and sixth the reformation of preaching so as to edify and awaken faith rather than being the vehicle of mere clerical debate or learned ostentation.²¹ These six points would characterize German Pietism.

In the early nineteenth century Mennonites began to interact with Lutheran Pietists in Prussia.²² In 1835 a group of Mennonites and German Pietists under the leadership of William Lange, a Lutheran Pietist, moved to Russia and founded the village of Gnadenfeld.²³ With few exceptions, all of the early members of the Mennonite Brethren church came from the Gnadenfeld community.²⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that something of the Pietist criticism of church formalism which deadened genuine faith can be detected in the

(New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 56.

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Ibid., 56-57.

²² J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975), 28.

²³ J.B. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church 1860-1990* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1993), 10.

²⁴ J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 29.

Mennonite Brethren decision to break from the Mennonite church. Immorality, greed, the intermingling of church and state, the lack of concern for one's neighbor and participation in baptism and communion as mere rites of passage rather than as expressions of a living faith were some of the practices which the Mennonite Brethren could not tolerate in the Mennonite church.²⁵ The Mennonite Brethren renewal movement, like Pietism, was concerned with a true, living faith in laymen and pastors alike. Herb Giesbrecht, a Mennonite Brethren scholar, goes so far as to claim that "in respect to [the Mennonite Brethren] Biblicistic stance...the early Brethren were among the authentic sons of Pietism."²⁶

Like the early renewal movements among the Russian colonies and the requirements of Spener's *Pia desideria* the Mennonite Brethren emphasized worship in private homes where prayer and diligent study of the Bible were common. They sought out leaders who spoke to invigorate faith and themselves sought a living, experiential, warm-hearted faith. Wilhelm Lange and Eduard Wuest were two nineteenth century German Pietists who worked among the Mennonites of Russia and were instrumental in bringing about renewal. Tobias Voth, an educational leader among the Mennonites who had been converted through the writings of Johann Jung-Stilling (a Pietist), was a key figure in teaching Mennonite youth the study of Scripture.²⁷ Pietist literature was a standard feature in the libraries of early Mennonite Brethren pastors. Thus, in various and important respects the Mennonite Brethren were shaped by a great branch of evangelicalism, that of German Pietism.²⁸

²⁵ J.B. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, 5-7.

²⁶ Herbert Giesbrecht, "Seeking a Faith to Live By: Some Extended Religious and Theological Influences on Mennonite Brethren," *Direction* 10 (July 1981): 7.

²⁷ J.B. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, 9.

²⁸ Martin H. Schrag, "The Impact of Pietism Upon Early American Mennonites," in

Fundamentalism

The bulk of the Mennonite Brethren of Russia who immigrated to Canada arrived in the 1920's. The aftermath of the Russian Revolution and widespread famine had devastated most of their villages not to mention their livelihoods and families. Many Mennonites fled to Canada and the United States. In North America, the Mennonite Brethren interacted with and were influenced by another branch of evangelicalism, fundamentalism. George Marsden defines American fundamentalism as evangelicals who are militantly opposed "to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with secular humanism."²⁹ Fundamentalists are a sub-type of evangelicals who are willing to take a stand and fight. Fundamentalism like evangelicalism is a movement with common history and traits. By the 1920's the term fundamentalist was the name of the militantly conservative among various evangelical churches and thus included militant conservatives among Baptists, Methodists, holiness groups, Presbyterians and so forth. By the 1930's the term fundamentalism took on a more limited meaning. Many fundamentalists left mainline churches and began to make separation from these churches a true test of faith. By the 1960's fundamentalist usually meant separatist and no longer

Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity, ed. F. Ernest Stoffer (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 121. "The Mennonites of Eastern Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century reacted in three ways to Pietism. Some accepted it fully at the expense of Mennonitism; others rejected Pietism to maintain traditional Mennonitism, and still others thought to integrate the two traditions." Schrag's analysis of the various ways in which Pietism influenced the Mennonites of Pennsylvania would seem to be quite prophetic for the experience of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren in the late twentieth century. Various Canadian Mennonite Brethren interacted with Pietism in the same three patterns.

²⁹ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 1.

included many conservatives in mainline denominations. Today fundamentalists are "predominantly separatist, Baptist, dispensationalists."³⁰

The revival movements that swept North America and Great Britain in the eighteenth century and which were led by such men as John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were named evangelical. A central and common core in these revivals was the proclamation of Christ's saving work on the cross and the necessity of putting personal trust in Christ. The revivals emphasized the importance of the Bible and a conversion experience. Evangelicalism influenced and shaped virtually all American denominations. Until the late nineteenth century American evangelicalism was a "broad coalition made up of many subgroups."³¹ At this point a split in evangelicalism began to emerge. There were some who responded to the cultural stresses of this era with a continued affirmation of traditional evangelical emphases while theological liberals were willing to modify some evangelical doctrines.³² Conservative evangelicals in various denominations began to view themselves as at war with liberal theology. Fundamentalists believed that they needed to fight for such issues as Biblical inerrancy, the premillennial return of Christ and the denial of all biological evolution.³³ Furthermore fundamentalists came to be characterized by an insistence on a strict moral code. In the 1950's conservative Protestantism again suffered a split. Under the leadership of Billy Graham and Carl F.

³⁰ Ibid., 3-4.

³¹ Ibid., 2-3.

³² George M. Marsden, "Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 23-24.

³³ Ibid., 22.

Henry many fundamentalists parted ways with fundamentalist organizations and began to call themselves new evangelicals.³⁴ From the 1950's onwards the Mennonite Brethren were most keen to join with and participate in the new evangelical movement.

Harry Loewen writes that "the Mennonite Brethren from the beginning of their history were more open to Pietistic, Evangelical, and Baptist influences than the rest of the Mennonites in Russia. In North America...these influences became stronger."³⁵ J.B. Toews discusses the influence of fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren theology. He argues that the Mennonite Brethren had never placed much emphasis on creedal formulations since the cultural isolation the Mennonites experienced in Russia never made it necessary to define their Anabaptist theology. The Mennonite Brethren were, therefore, theologically unprepared in the 1920's to deal with the influence of fundamentalist Bible institutes, radio programs and conferences.³⁶ Furthermore their open relationship with Pietists and Baptists in Russia had made the Mennonite Brethren open to interaction with other denominations.

Toews cites five areas of Mennonite Brethren faith which he believes have been shaped by fundamentalism: their view of Scripture, understanding of conversion, discipleship, the church as a brotherhood and missions and evangelism. Toews states that the focus on Biblical inerrancy was foreign to the Mennonite Brethren until their coming to America. The fundamentalist view of the Bible may have influenced the actions of a

³⁴ Ibid., 30.

³⁵ Harry Loewen, "Response to J.B. Toews' "The Influence of Fundamentalism Upon Mennonite Brethren Theology," Unpublished paper, [1980] Center For Mennonite Brethren Studies, Papers and Essays, Box 8, Folder C, 3.

³⁶ J.B. Toews, "The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology," *Direction* 10 (April 1981): 22.

Mennonite Brethren Bible college in British Columbia in the 1950's. This institute had a ceremonial burning of a Revised Standard Version of the Bible and pledged commitment to the King James Version alone.³⁷ Second, the early Mennonite Brethren perceived conversion as a decision to pick up one's cross and follow Jesus in an attitude of denial of self. Toews believes that fundamentalism's perception of conversion as an act done to achieve certain personal benefits, salvation and so forth, has weakened the Mennonite concept of conversion as an act of self-denial.³⁸ Third, the early Mennonite Brethren believed that genuine conversion to Christ involved a life of discipleship which included the Anabaptist peace position, non-violence, justice issues and so forth. The Mennonite Brethren's openness to fundamentalism's strong militancy and emphasis on patriotism is likely a reason why the Mennonite Brethren hesitate to accept the peace position.³⁹ Fourth, the early Mennonite Brethren emphasized an interdependent fellowship of believers and congregations. Each congregation was to be responsible for the spiritual and physical care of the members of both its own congregation and all other congregations. Toews argues that the independent and individualistic style of fundamentalism has eroded the interdependent style of Mennonite Brethren churches. Fifth, Toews believes that the fundamentalist emphasis on soul-winning has tended to cause Mennonite Brethren to neglect long term discipleship of new believers in their missionary efforts.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

³⁸ Ibid., 24-25.

³⁹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

Evangelical Emphasis in the Mennonite Brethren Church Today

The Mennonite Brethren have been shaped by various movements within evangelicalism but are they evangelicals? In the above section evangelicalism was understood to be specific movements in Christian history which share certain core beliefs. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the Mennonite Brethren were keen to identify with the mainstream evangelical movement in Canada. The question left to answer is whether the Mennonite Brethren shared the same emphasis on activism, Biblicism, conversionism and crucicentrism that evangelicals emphasize. In 1993 George Rawlyk conducted a national survey in which he attempted to depict the character of Canadian evangelicalism. Rawlyk used Bebbington's evangelical quadrilateral as the basic definition of evangelicalism.⁴¹ A brief look at the shape of Canadian evangelicalism will help to compare the Canadian Mennonite Brethren to the larger evangelical landscape and provide a basis for determining whether the Mennonite Brethren are part of the Canadian evangelical spectrum.

We will compare Rawlyk's data with two valuable sources in which a survey of Mennonite Brethren beliefs have been collected: Kauffman and Harder's *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* and the Mennonite Brethren *Membership Profile*. The purpose of the *Membership Profile* church survey was to replicate the findings of the Kauffman and Harder survey in the Mennonite Brethren church.⁴² Kauffman and Harder's study was published in 1975 and the *Membership Profile* survey was conducted in 1982. The statistical

⁴¹ George Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour?*, 9-10, 80, 118.

⁴² J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile: 1972-1982," *Direction* 14 (Fall 1985): 6.

information on the Mennonite Brethren thus predates Rawlyk's survey but still provides a fairly accurate depiction of Mennonite Brethren belief. We will use the data collected in these two sources as the foundation of comparison with Rawlyk's survey.

An area in which Canadian evangelicals seemed to have the most consensus was the aspect of crucicentrism. Ninety-nine per cent of evangelicals strongly or moderately agreed with the statement "I feel that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of my sins" and 98 per cent strongly or moderately *disagreed* with the statement, " In my view, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God."⁴³ Canadian evangelicals seem to agree that Jesus Christ and the cross are key to their faith.

Unfortunately, on the topic of crucicentrism neither of the Mennonite surveys is that helpful. Both Kauffman and Harder and the Membership profile report that 95 per cent of Mennonite Brethren agree with the statement, "Jesus was not only human but also is the Divine Son of God"⁴⁴ but no specific question on the importance of Jesus life, death and resurrection in relationship to the forgiveness of sin is asked. One would be wrong, however, to conclude that Jesus' death and resurrection are unimportant to the Mennonite Brethren. That such a question does not appear in the list of survey questions might indicate how much this fact is taken for granted. The survey, after all, was not intended to test Bebbington's quadrilateral.

⁴³ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁴ J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later: A Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1975), 106.

J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile," 13.

The Mennonite Brethren believe that their faith requires "a profound commitment to take Jesus seriously in everyday life."⁴⁵ J.A. Toews's *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* demonstrates how integral belief in Christ is to the denomination. Even in a book dedicated to a historical account of the tradition, "Christ, teachings of" appears as an entry title in the index. Throughout the historical narrative Toews states that the impetus for many of their actions came from their reading of Christ's message. The Mennonite Brethren desired a "living piety in which the individual believer receives assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, and orders his life definitely according to the teachings of Christ".⁴⁶ Furthermore, their study of Scripture led them to believe that the locus of Biblical authority was the teaching of Christ and as such discipleship, fashioning one's life on the teaching and example of Christ, constituted the essential way of life. Like the evangelicals surveyed by Rawlyk, the Mennonite Brethren keep Christ and the cross central to their faith.

Rawlyk's survey revealed the importance that Canadian evangelicals place on the Bible. Ninety-five per cent of evangelicals surveyed strongly or moderately agreed with the statement, "I feel God speaks to me directly through the Bible." Since evangelicals believe God speaks to them through the Bible it is not surprising that 42 per cent claimed to read the Bible daily and an additional 36 per cent to read the Bible weekly.⁴⁷ While evangelicals agree that God speaks to them through the Bible, they disagree somewhat on the inerrant nature of the Bible and the need to interpret it literally. Rawlyk asked a series of questions

⁴⁵ John E. Toews, "Where To Mennonite Brethren...?" *Christian Leader* 6 January 1976, 2.

⁴⁶ J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 84. See also page 108, 368 and 370-71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

in order to determine how influenced Canadian evangelicals were by the fundamentalist doctrine of inerrancy. Fifty per cent of evangelicals strongly or moderately agreed with the statement, "I feel the Bible is the Word of God, but do not believe it should be taken literally word for word." Most Canadian evangelicals take the creation accounts and the life, death and resurrection accounts of Jesus as historically accurate.⁴⁸ Rawlyk reported that he was surprised to find that the area of Biblical inerrancy seemed to provide the most noticeable area in which fundamentalism influences Canadian evangelicals.

On the topic of Biblicism the Mennonite survey provides ample data. In 1982, 44 per cent of Canadian Mennonite Brethren reported that they read their Bible daily.⁴⁹ The Kauffman and Harder survey reported that 42 per cent of Mennonite Brethren claimed to read their Bible daily and an additional 35 per cent claimed to read it frequently.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Mennonite Brethren consider the Bible to be historically accurate concerning the life of Christ. Ninety-six per cent agreed with the statement, "I believe Jesus' physical resurrection was an objective historical fact just as His birth was a historical fact" and 95 per cent agreed that the "miracles were supernatural acts of God which actually happened just as the Bible says they did."⁵¹ Rawlyk believed that the issue of Biblical inerrancy was one area in which fundamentalism has most influenced Canadian evangelicalism. In 1982, 93 per cent of Canadian Mennonite Brethren agreed with the statement, "the Bible is inspired and infallible."⁵² This high view of the Bible, however, does

⁴⁸ Ibid., 120-123.

⁴⁹ J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile," 21.

⁵⁰ J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, 98.

⁵¹ Ibid., 106.

not necessarily imply agreement with the doctrine of inerrancy. In 1982, only 52 per cent of Canadian Mennonite Brethren agreed with the statement that the earth was created in six days.⁵³ The fact that 48 per cent of Mennonite Brethren do not interpret the Biblical time frame of creation in a literal way indicates that they do not follow a completely literal interpretation of the Bible, a corner stone of the doctrine of inerrancy.

The category of activism is one which Rawlyk believes to be important in Canadian evangelicalism. Ninety-six per cent of evangelicals strongly or moderately agreed that "it is very important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians."⁵⁴ In Conservative Protestant circles witnessing usually meant a conscious effort to give some form of oral testimony in addition to morally upright but non-verbal actions. Twenty per cent of this group claimed that they shared their faith every day, and an additional 22 and 14 per cent claimed to witness every week and month, respectively. Evangelicals also felt it was important to financially support others whose primary job is to witness to and convert non-Christians. Ninety-five per cent of Canadian evangelicals agreed that it was important to financially support mission work.⁵⁵

Sharing an oral witness about the Christian faith to those around them is a high priority for the Mennonite Brethren. In 1982, 77 per cent claimed that they witnessed orally about their faith to fellow co-workers and friends and 79 per cent claimed to occasionally invite non-Christians to church.⁵⁶ The Mennonite Brethren also consider it important that

⁵² J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile, 13.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 124.

non-Christians become Christians. In 1972, 74 per cent of them claimed that they had, on a few occasions, tried to lead someone to faith in Christ. An additional 13 per cent claimed to do this often.⁵⁷ Furthermore the Mennonite Brethren indicated that they gave substantial financial support to mission work. In 1982, 35 per cent of Mennonite Brethren wanted to *increase* financial support for foreign and home missions.⁵⁸ This is in addition to the approximately 50 per cent who wanted to at least maintain their current level of financial support for mission work.⁵⁹

Rawlyk concluded that the aspect of conversionism was perhaps the least important area of the evangelical quadrilateral in contemporary Canadian evangelicalism. Though the experience of the New Birth was perhaps the most important feature of eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelicalism, Rawlyk concludes that the New Birth is "no longer the key defining experience."⁶⁰ Only 64 per cent of the evangelicals surveyed considered themselves to be *born-again Christians* although virtually all who would not call themselves born again did claim to have some kind of conversion experience. Rawlyk believes that a conversion experience is still important to Canadian evangelicals but that many hesitate to claim to be born again for fear of being identified as a fundamentalist⁶¹ This conclusion is somewhat fuzzy as Rawlyk does not provide any statistical survey results to back up this

⁵⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁷ J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, 213.

⁵⁸ J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile, 17.

⁵⁹ J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, 241.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁶¹ Ibid., 119-129.

assertion. Regardless of why Canadian evangelicals do not like the term *born again* conversion is not unimportant to them.

Though Rawlyk claims that conversionism is the least important of the quadrilateral among Canadian evangelicals, conversion still plays an important role among the Mennonite Brethren. Ninety-one per cent of Mennonite Brethren reported that they had had a conversion experience at one point in their lives.⁶² Kauffman and Harder discuss conversion in greater detail. They define conversion as a distinct occasion in life when one makes a definite decision to become vitally committed to God and accept Christ as Saviour, or as a period in life when one becomes very much aware that they were making a new start to walk with God. To this definition 93 per cent of Mennonite Brethren agreed that they had had such an experience.⁶³

A comparison of the two data sources indicates that at least in the most basic of definitions the Mennonite Brethren are evangelical. Granted there is a spectrum of evangelical emphases within the Mennonite Brethren Church but in general terms they hold to the doctrines of faith which characterize evangelicals. The Mennonite Brethren emphasize crucicentrism, Biblicism, activism and conversionism. They have been open to the theologies and doctrines of major evangelical groups. Not only do the Mennonite Brethren perceive themselves to be evangelical but they wish to work together with other evangelical groups.⁶⁴ They have been and continue to be involved in national evangelical bodies such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

⁶² J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile, 19.

⁶³ J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, 87.

ANABAPTISM

Major Characteristics of Anabaptism

The terms Mennonite and Anabaptist also require explanation in the foundation of this study. Perhaps a definition of the term Anabaptist and a brief summary of typical Anabaptist concerns would be helpful. Anabaptism was the movement which began when a small group of Christians who had formerly been supporters of Ulrich Zwingli became convinced that they needed to establish a brotherhood of believers. These Christians came to think that adult, believer's baptism was the proper outward sign of a confession of faith and of a commitment to live a true Christian life. Thus, they re-baptized one another upon the confession of their faith. The time and place was Zurich, Switzerland, January 1525.⁶⁵ In a world in which virtually every member of society was baptized as an infant, the act of re-baptism and the refusal to have one's own children baptized by the church was unacceptable in a world where church and state were intertwined. Re-baptism became a

⁶⁵Bruce L. Guenther, "Living With the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites in Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. G. A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 232-34. Guenther discusses how the Mennonite Brethren were involved in the Canadian Sunday School Mission, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade For Christ and others, very early in their North American experience. Guenther states that these "early associations contributed considerably towards forging permanent links between the Mennonite Brethren and transdenominational evangelicalism."

⁶⁶Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel 1498-1526: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren Sometimes Called Anabaptists* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1950), xiv.

criminal act. William Estep describes the repression of the Anabaptists as "one of the most widely spread persecutions in Christian history."⁶⁶

Their insistence on adult, believer's baptism was not their only concern. H.S. Bender's summary of the Anabaptist vision explains what many Mennonites believe the essence of Anabaptism to be.⁶⁷ First, Bender wants to make clear who is being referred to by the term Anabaptist. Anabaptism proper is the "original evangelical and constructive form" which maintained an unbroken course throughout the sixteenth century and continues today in the Mennonite movement. Other, often unrelated groups came to be called Anabaptist but Bender states that these groups came and went and are not to be confused with genuine Anabaptism.⁶⁸

Second, what did the Anabaptists believe? Bender states that the Anabaptist vision was primarily concerned with a life patterned after the teaching and example of Christ. Three major points of emphasis were part of their central teaching of the New Testament; discipleship, brotherhood and non-resistance. The most important aspect of a true faith was the desire to follow Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*) in word and deed. True repentance must be

⁶⁶William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 74-75.

⁶⁷Since the publication of "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins" by James Stayer, Werner Packull and Klaus Deppermann Mennonite scholars do not regard Anabaptism as being as monolithic or linear as Bender did. Bender has, however, identified the heart of the movement. The number of ways or places that Anabaptism arose is not as important to this study as recognizing the main thrust of the ideas which animated the early Mennonites and which many Mennonites today regard as the heart of Anabaptism.

⁶⁸H. S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (April 1944): 72-73.

evident in renewed behavior and the Anabaptists endeavored to live at all times with the utmost integrity and piety. Baptism was the most important outward symbol of a commitment to continuously take up one's cross and follow Christ.⁶⁹

The second aspect of the Anabaptist vision was voluntary membership in the church. Church reformers such as Luther and Zwingli retained the concept of a mass church in which the law made it compulsory for the entire population to be a member from birth to death. An infant could not possibly make a commitment to follow Christ in a life of discipleship yet this infant could grow up and be considered a member of the church never having made such a decision. The Anabaptists believed that a true church consisted of individuals who had consciously committed themselves to following Christ. Furthermore, because joining a church was to be voluntary, no one should be forced through any form of persecution to join the church. They believed that violence could not produce genuine faith. The Anabaptists, rejecting infant baptism and state enforced church membership, disassociated themselves from the state church. They believed that it was necessary to be separate from the world; to be in it but not to conform to it. Their desire to be non-conformists led them to take literally the words of the New Testament which state that in this world followers of Christ will experience tribulation. Anabaptists believed that a true church was one that was willing to suffer. Finally, a true church was one that sought to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of those around them, whether or not they were members of the Anabaptist movement.⁷⁰ The third aspect of Anabaptist emphasis was "the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 78-81.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 82-84.

ethic of love and non-resistance as applied to all human relationships.”⁷¹ For the Anabaptists Biblical pacifism meant that one did not participate in any type of warfare, strife, violence or the taking of human life. Anabaptists endeavored to be known for their brotherly love and peaceful ways.

Today many Mennonites believe that to be a Mennonite is to stand as the successor to the Anabaptist vision. The Mennonite Brethren began as a movement that tried to return to the emphases of Menno and the Bible. However, it will be pointed out shortly that many other Mennonite groups perceive the Mennonite Brethren as having difficulty in accepting the Anabaptist vision.

Brief History of the Mennonite Brethren Church as Part of the Anabaptist Tradition⁷²

The Mennonite Brethren look back to the Radical Reformation as part of their religious heritage. During that era the Mennonite label was used to describe the followers of Menno Simons (1496-1561). Menno was not the founder of the movement which eventually was named after him but rather it was Menno who gave leadership and pastoral care to a group of Anabaptists in Holland and Germany. Menno, unlike most leaders of the oft persecuted Anabaptist groups, lived a relatively long life. His capable and continuous leadership brought together the Anabaptists of the area and he often pleaded for the end of their persecution. Menno spent much of his own life with the threat of imprisonment and

⁷¹ Ibid., 85.

⁷² For a fuller account of Mennonite History see C.J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981) as well as Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1962).

death over him and had to flee many times to escape arrest. The Mennonites themselves also experienced persecution for their religious beliefs and thus many fled to various places in Europe. Following the death of Menno many Dutch Mennonites immigrated to Prussia. As early as the late eighteenth century Dutch Mennonites from Prussia immigrated to Russia and settled on the Ukrainian Steppes. By the time of the First World War the Mennonite colonies in Russia were large, thriving and generally prosperous.

Today the Mennonite family is made up of a collection of separate and distinct denominations. In 1859, however, there was effectively one church, one denomination, in the Russian colonies. In 1860 the Mennonite Brethren broke away from the Mennonite Church. Eighteen members signed the Document of Secession⁷³ in January, 1860 and submitted it to the Church Council of Elders. With this document the Mennonite Brethren notified the Church that they were disassociating themselves from the larger Mennonite Church. The Mennonite Brethren were not protesting the teachings of Menno Simons - the Document of Secession ends with an affirmation of their agreement with Menno - but rather the Mennonite Brethren believed that the Mennonite Church had become too decadent to function as a true Church of God. The Mennonite Brethren left the Old Church so that they could renew a vision of faith and church based on the New Testament and the teachings of Menno Simons. The signers of the Document would rather have stayed in their local congregations but felt that the leaders of the Church would not listen to their pleas to

⁷³ Document of Secession reprinted in full in J. A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 34-35.

reform the Church. As a result, eighteen objectors left their congregations. They believed that leaving was a necessary act of conscience.⁷⁴

As might be expected, the Mother Church's reaction to the new Mennonite Brethren church was fairly negative. The early Mennonite Brethren experienced various kinds of repressive measures including the prohibition of their religious gatherings. Unauthorized religious groups were illegal and so the Mother Church threatened them with the punishments of the Russian Penal code. It took several years before the Mennonite Brethren were able to worship in complete freedom. In 1866 Johann Claassen obtained official recognition from the authorities in Moscow of full religious and civil liberties for all Mennonite Brethren.⁷⁵ The Mother Church, which had reacted to the men and women leaving the Church with threats of expulsion and other acts of repression, formally recognized the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1862. The recognition of the Mennonite Brethren Church prevented the Colony Administrative Office from sending a group of early Mennonite Brethren to exile in Siberia. Recognition of the new church did not end all acts of hostility towards the Mennonite Brethren members but it was the first step on a long path towards reconciliation between the two groups. In 1960, at the Mennonite Brethren centennial celebrations, the President of the General Conference of Mennonites, the name the Mother Church came to be called, gave an address in which he recalled the 325 years of joint brotherhood. He expressed regret about the events which led to their separation even while acknowledging the need for spiritual renewal which existed in the colonies at the time

⁷⁴ J. A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 39.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 43, 48.

of the separation. The President closed the speech with a prayer for a more united, closer fellowship between the two groups and listed MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) as an area in which he was thankful that the two could work together.⁷⁶

A final clarifying point needs to be made here. The term Mennonite has taken on ethnic connotations in Canadian society today. This perception is linked to their history of colony living. Pictures of Old Order Mennonites dressed in black and riding in buggies in Southern Ontario, a Mennonite Museum in Steinbach and restaurants serving Mennonite food help to communicate to Canadian society that to be Mennonite is to be part of a specific ethnic and cultural group. It cannot be ignored that in some places in Canada today to be a Mennonite is to be part of an exclusive ethnic group. This thesis, however, concentrates on the religious aspect of the term Mennonite. When this essay refers to the Mennonite Brethren it is referring to those individuals who are committed to worship and participation in a Mennonite Brethren church. It is not referring to those individuals who may have been born to Mennonite Brethren parents but who later left the Mennonite Brethren church.

Anabaptist Emphases in the Mennonite Brethren Church Today

Though the above historical analysis is helpful, it does not delve deep enough to answer whether the Mennonite Brethren are truly Mennonites or how they fit into the Mennonite family at present. J.A. Toews argues that the early Mennonite Brethren wanted to remain true to the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. They did not want to be Pietists

⁷⁶ Ibid., 50.

or Baptists or anything else even though they separated from the Old Church. Several documents bear out Toews's assertion. Both the Document of Secession and the petitions to the Czar emphasize their intent to form a Church in the spirit and discipline of the Gospel and the teachings of Menno Simons.⁷⁷ The Mennonite Brethren in Canada, however, have been accused and often rightly so, of being stand-offish towards the rest of the Mennonite family. Katie Funk Wiebe makes a frank comment in a book intended to introduce newcomers to the various aspects of the Mennonite Brethren church. In a chapter which discusses inter-Mennonite connections Wiebe says: "You may sense that Mennonite Brethren unity with other Mennonites is not strongly apparent at the congregational level with regard to peace and non-violence issues, social ethics and relationship to the state."⁷⁸ Mennonite Brethren have a reputation among the Mennonite family of being more concerned with being evangelical than teaching Anabaptist principles.

Kauffman and Harder created a scale to measure how closely each of the five denominations in their study adhered to the sixteenth century principles of Anabaptism. This "Anabaptism Scale" was based on Bender's description of the Anabaptist vision. Interestingly, Kauffman and Harder rank the Mennonite Brethren church as the second highest in adherence to Anabaptist principles.⁷⁹ The Mennonite Brethren appear to be firmly in the Anabaptist tradition. This is not to say, however, that the Mennonite Brethren

⁷⁷Peter. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, trans. J.B. Toews and others (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, 1978), 250.

⁷⁸Katie Funk Wiebe, *Who Are the Mennonite Brethren?* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1984), 98.

⁷⁹J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, 27, 114, 302. There are five denominations represented in the survey.

do not struggle with accepting some aspects of the Anabaptist vision. A more detailed look at some more specific statistics will show this tension.

Bender believed that the most important aspect of early Anabaptism was the desire to fashion one's life after the example of Christ. Only 47 per cent of Mennonite Brethren in Canada agreed that Jesus expects us to follow his example which he set in life and ministry.⁸⁰ The Mennonite Brethren concern for a life of discipleship which is manifested in a life of piety seems to be much stronger when looking at statistics on moral practices. A high majority of Mennonite Brethren declared that drunkenness, marihuana use, premarital and extramarital sex, marrying a non-Christian and so forth were always wrong.⁸¹

The Mennonite Brethren adherence to Anabaptist voluntarism seems fairly high. Ninety-five per cent of respondents claimed that joining the church was their own choice. The Mennonite Brethren seem to be in line with the Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism as 84 per cent agreed that infant baptism was neither necessary nor proper.⁸² The average age of baptism for Mennonite Brethren members was approximately sixteen years of age.⁸³ Becoming a member and participating in the local congregation were very important for 77 per cent of the respondents.⁸⁴ A majority of members endorsed statements that supported a separation of church and state. Sixty-eight per cent agreed that participating in some government tasks could not be done with a clear Christian conscience and 72 per cent said

⁸⁰ J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile, 14-15.

⁸¹ Ibid., 22.

⁸² Ibid., 14-16.

⁸³ J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, 71.

⁸⁴ J.B. Toews, Abram G. Konrad, and Al Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile, 22.

that it was wrong to swear the oath demanded by civil authorities on some occasions.⁸⁵ The Mennonite Brethren, like the early Anabaptists see the church as a suffering church. Seventy-nine per cent agreed that Christians can expect persecution.⁸⁶ Nearly a third of the respondents said that money allocated to relief aid and services should be increased in addition to the more than fifty per cent that wanted to at least maintain the level of assistance given to those in need.⁸⁷ Seventy-five per cent of Mennonite Brethren claimed that they were satisfied with the work of Mennonite Disaster Service and MCC.⁸⁸ Thus, the Mennonite Brethren seem to agree with the Anabaptist principle that one should not ignore the physical needs of others.

The Mennonite Brethren are well known among the Mennonite community for the difficulty they have in accepting the peace position.⁸⁹ Only 54 per cent of Mennonite Brethren agreed that a Christian should take no part in war or any war-promoting activities and only 47 per cent agreed that one should promote the peace position and attempt to win as many supporters to the position as possible from the larger society.⁹⁰ The Mennonite Brethren fell far below all the other Mennonite denominations in the survey, except the Evangelical Mennonite Church, in these areas.⁹¹ Still, about half of the Mennonite Brethren

⁸⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁸ J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 177.

⁸⁹ Jacob A. Loewen and Wesley J. Priebe, *Only the Sword of the Spirit* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1997), i.

⁹⁰ Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994). See especially pages 214-221 for a detailed analysis of Mennonite Brethren attitudes toward non-resistance in comparison to other Mennonite denominations.

church remains committed to an Anabaptist position of peace. The Mennonite Brethren remain in the Mennonite family and are committed to many Anabaptist principles, but it must also be acknowledged that this commitment is at times hesitant and not unanimous.

IDENTITY

The final term to be explored is that of identity. Religion is one of the five dimensions of identity listed by Kauffman and Driedger.⁹² These two scholars also included community, family, institutions and culture as dimensions of identity but these will not be focused on in this study. The Mennonites, according to Kauffman and Driedger, have always considered religion as a central feature of their identity. They state that religion is "one of the most important stakes in the Mennonite sacred canopy; many people see it as the center pole, and all other poles as secondary or even of little importance."⁹³ Religion is also central in Mennonite Brethren self-understanding.

"The most fundamental question to occupy the Mennonite Brethren church in the 1970's focused on identity."⁹⁴ During the 1970's and continuing into the 1980's the Mennonite Brethren perceived themselves to be in a crisis of identity. Religion was at the heart of this crisis. At a national convention in 1973, the Mennonite Brethren voted on a resolution of 'Mennonite Brethren identity.' The resolution, which was passed almost

⁹¹ J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, 133.

⁹² J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic*, 42-43.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 67, 68.

⁹⁴ Peter Penner, *No Longer At Arms Length*, 154.

unanimously, indicates that their perception of who they were was tied to their religious beliefs. Furthermore, their statements show that they were seeking out a religious self-understanding by looking to their spiritual heritage. The resolution stated that "The early brethren (MB) rediscovered in the Anabaptist vision a historical realization of the New Testament ideal of the Believer's Church...An emphasis on the historical dimensions of the faith has always been a significant factor in the spiritual identity as well as the spiritual dynamic of any religious movement."⁹⁵ The statement on identity also urged churches to teach their members about the denomination's spiritual heritage and instruct their adherents with the beliefs expressed in the Confession of Faith.

The Mennonite Brethren believed that history shapes identity and that religion was central to their self-understanding. Thus, the Mennonite Brethren's identity crisis revolved around the issues of belief and spiritual history. Their relationship to evangelicalism was part of this intellectual and spiritual struggle. They investigated how evangelicalism had shaped their spiritual heritage and what influence it had had on their belief systems. Whether or not evangelicalism had exerted positive or negative influences on their denomination was a central topic in their investigation of their past. Whether or not the Mennonite Brethren should accept evangelical doctrines was a key aspect in their investigation of their beliefs.

In the previous pages the terms Evangelicalism, Mennonite and Anabaptism have been discussed and we have indicated how these terms apply to the Mennonite

⁹⁵ Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren, "Contending For the Faith," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 3 August 1973, 7.

Brethren. What we are really talking about when we discuss the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren of Canada and evangelicalism, however, is the tension the Mennonite Brethren experience as they embrace these two traditions. The Mennonite Brethren want to be both Evangelical and Mennonite-Anabaptist. Evangelicalism and Anabaptism share some common concerns. Anabaptism would certainly not disagree with the doctrines expressed in the evangelical quadrilateral but Anabaptism and Evangelicalism are different traditions. Anabaptism focuses on discipleship, voluntarism and the ethic of love and peace. Evangelicalism often endorses a closer alliance of church and government and support of war than the Anabaptist position. The Mennonite Brethren desire to adhere to both of these religious frameworks naturally creates, at the very least, a tension of emphases. The desire to be Evangelical while maintaining their Mennonite self-understanding forced the Mennonite Brethren to sort out their commitments to both traditions.

In the following chapters each of the three key terms will be picked up and further explored. With each chapter the rise in tension between evangelical and Anabaptist traditions will be observed. The decision to embrace the EFC seemed to show a high degree of acceptance of mainstream evangelicalism without apparent tension. Chapter three will demonstrate, however, that in the developing study of their historical roots there was divided views as to the role of each tradition in their past. Finally chapter four discusses the flashpoint of tension, the name change debate, in which most of the denomination argued vehemently about their religious identity.

CHAPTER 2

EVANGELICALISM: THE MENNONITE BROTHERS JOIN THE EFC

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren and evangelicalism does not begin in the late 1960's. This remains true even if one restricts the analysis to Canada. In Canada, the Mennonite Brethren attended evangelical schools such as Prairie Bible Institute and Toronto Bible College.¹ Prairie Bible Institute, in particular, was a center for training missionaries. Many of the Mennonite Brethren, who also possessed a great zeal for missions,² attended this institute and there came into contact with evangelicals from non-Mennonite backgrounds.³ When the Mennonite Brethren began Bible training centers of their own, evangelical schools were used as models. The founder of Herbert Bible School, William Bestvater,⁴ and the founder of Bethany Bible Institute, George Harms,⁵

¹ John Stackhouse's *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* devotes a chapter to each of these two institutions and argues that they shaped mainstream Canadian evangelicalism.

² Peter Penner, *No Longer At Arms Length*. This work recounts the history of the Mennonite Brethren church planting efforts in Canada and gives a glimpse into the passion for home missions.

³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴ J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 157.

⁵ Bruce Guenther, "Living With the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism Among

both received training at Moody Bible Institute and were considerably influenced by this institution. In addition to their own mission projects the Mennonite Brethren joined mission organizations not sponsored by the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Many became involved with the Canadian Sunday School Mission, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Campus Crusade for Christ.⁶ Missions and Bible schools were two great evangelical influences on the Mennonite Brethren of Canada prior to the last half of the twentieth century.

Interaction with Evangelical Movements

The Mennonite Brethren have been open to the influence of evangelicalism since their beginnings in Russia. Although J.A. Toews down plays this emphasis in his *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, others argue that evangelicalism has been an important feature of the Mennonite Brethren Church since 1860. J.B. Toews expounds at length on the influence of the Pietists and the Baptists on the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Eduard Wuest, often cited as the most influential Pietist among the Brethren, preached among the colonies in Russia. Many Mennonites were drawn to his admonitions to live strictly according to the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pietistic literature was a part of Mennonite Brethren libraries in Russia and formed a large part of a Mennonite Brethren pastor's required reading.⁷ The influence of the Baptists on the early

Mennonites in Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 231.

⁶Bruce Guenther, *Living With the Virus*, 232-33.

⁷J.B. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Identity and Theological Adversity," in *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History*, ed. Paul Toews (Fresno, CA:

Mennonite Brethren is also considerable.⁸ Indeed the birth of the Baptist movement in Prussia "largely coincided with that of the Mennonite Brethren in South Russia."⁹ Almost all early Mennonite Brethren missionaries were trained at Baptist seminaries in Germany. Those returning from the Baptist schools introduced Baptist style church polity. The role of the pastor and the organization of church hierarchy were largely modeled on Baptist styles.¹⁰

The Mennonite Brethren in Canada

Though the Mennonite Brethren were in contact with Pietistic and Baptist elements while still in Russia, the potential for interaction among evangelicals increased exponentially after coming to Canada. Perhaps the newness of the country in addition to their tendency to disassociate themselves from other Mennonite groups made them seek out others who held similar beliefs. Once in North America, they discovered that evangelicals held a similar high regard for the Bible as they themselves had and thus tended to gravitate towards evangelical organizations. As a result, the Mennonite Brethren were introduced to new theological ideas, such as the notions of pre-millennialism. Bestvater, the founder of Herbert Bible School, was largely responsible for the dissemination of dispensationalist eschatology among the Mennonite Brethren of Canada.¹¹ In short, the Mennonite Brethren have a long history of interaction with evangelicalism.

Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1977), 134-36.

⁸ See also, Paul Toews, ed. *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1993).

⁹ Peter J. Klassen, "Baptists and Mennonites in Poland and Prussia," in *Baptists and Mennonites And Baptists: A Continuing Conversation*, ed. Paul Toews (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1993), 73.

¹⁰ J.B. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Identity and Theological Adversity," 141-43.

The Mennonite Brethren did not, however, abandon their own denomination for evangelical ones. Their style of church and denominational structure remained similar to what they had organized in Russia. Here a brief summary of the organizational structure of the Mennonite Brethren Conference will be given since much of the data consulted on the topic of the Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada comes from the minutes of board meetings and Canadian Conference conventions.

The Conference of Mennonite Brethren in North America began in 1879 in Nebraska. The bulk of Mennonite Brethren in North America at that time were in the United States, in particular, Nebraska, Kansas and Minnesota. The missionary efforts of American Mennonite Brethren who moved to the area of Winkler, Manitoba led to the creation of the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada in 1886.¹² With time and continued missionary outreach the number of churches in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the then North West Territories expanded. At the annual Mennonite Brethren conference of 1909, the Mennonite Brethren decided to divide the conference into three districts, the South, Central and Northern Districts. Canadian churches comprised the bulk of the Northern district. The conference decided that each district was responsible for local missions and other local matters. Conference responsibilities included foreign missions, publications, education and almost every other matter.¹³ The official title of the Conference became *The General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren of North America*. By 1924 Hillsboro, Kansas was the undisputed center of the General Conference.¹⁴ The great wave

¹¹ Bruce Guenther, *Living With the Virus*, 231.

¹² J. A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 153-54.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 202.

of Mennonite Brethren immigrants to Canada in the 1920's brought about many tensions and changes to the General Conference. The expanding population and mission activities in both Canada and Pacific United States created lopsided representation. Thus, in 1954 the General Conference underwent a change of organization. The General Conference was now made up of two Area Conferences, Canada and the United States. Each Area Conference was responsible for higher education, home missions, youth work and Church schools while the General Conference provided consultative committees in the above four activities.¹⁵ The Canadian Conference met every year and the General Conference every three years.¹⁶ The Canadian Conference was further subdivided into five provincial Conferences, from British Columbia to Ontario. One board which served the Canadian Conference during this time was the Board of Reference and Council, BORAC, which was later re-named the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns; BOSSC. The Canadian Conference was served by several other Boards as well.

As discussed above, the Mennonite Brethren of Canada had a keen interest in the ideas and programs of evangelicals in Canada and the United States. Whatever the interest or influence, the relationship with evangelicalism remained informal until 1973 when they joined the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. This chapter will examine the discussion and at times the lack of discussion and debate among the various levels of the Canadian

¹⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹⁵ Ibid., 210.

¹⁶ The January 8, 1999 and March 5, 1999 issues of the Mennonite Brethren Herald reported that the task force of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren should be dissolved as a legal entity. This matter will be voted on at the summer Conference, 1999.

Mennonite Brethren Conference when the opportunity arose to formally join a Canadian evangelical body.

First, an important point of clarification must be made. Canadian Mennonite Brethren were officially and formally affiliated with an evangelical organization prior to the 1973 decision to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. As mentioned earlier, the Canadian Mennonite Brethren churches were part of the Northern District of the General Conference until 1954. Many of the churches of the General Conference at that time were located in the United States. In 1944 the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren was the only Mennonite group to join the National Association of Evangelicals. The Mennonite Brethren joined the NAE almost immediately following its inception; a pattern that would be continued in 1973 in Canada. With the division of the General Conference along the Canadian and American boarder in 1954, the Canadian churches no longer remained part of the NAE. The experience with the NAE, however, probably encouraged many Mennonite Brethren to endorse a relationship with a Canadian organization which was similar to the one they had with the NAE. ¹⁷

The ties that the early Mennonite Brethren maintained with their American sister churches provided a continuing openness to the events and ideas of the United States. To be sure, the Mennonite Brethren of Canada were not a carbon copy of their American sister churches. Broadly speaking the Canadian Mennonite Brethren arrived in the New World much later than their American relatives and thus were far behind in the process of acculturation.¹⁸ As well, Canadian culture exerted different influences on the immigrants

¹⁷J.A. Toews, *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 375, 86-87.

than in the United States.¹⁹ Still, the emphasis of unity among all Mennonite Brethren which began in Russia was carried over into the New World.²⁰ Even though over time the Canadian churches grew larger in number than those in the States, the Canadian Mennonite Brethren tried to maintain filial interest in their American counterparts and as a result in American evangelicalism.

Many articles in the Mennonite Brethren *Herald* during the late sixties and early seventies display this interest in their American sister churches and in American evangelicalism in general. In addition to featuring articles by the influential Carl F. Henry²¹ and Myron Augsburg²² the *Herald* reported as news features the events of the first U.S. Congress on Evangelism held in 1969. This news article concludes with a long list of Mennonite Brethren delegates who attended this conference which included men and women from both American and Canadian churches.²³ Many other such articles found within the pages of the *Herald* indicate an openness to the ideas and events of American churches both within and beyond their denomination.

By the time we begin our study in the 1970's the Mennonite Brethren of Canada had become well aware of evangelical institutions and organizations, especially Bible schools,

¹⁸ Guenther, *Living with the Virus*, 231-233.

¹⁹ Mark Noll, "Canadian Evangelicalism: A View From the United States," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 3-20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

²¹ Carl F. Henry, "Putting the Evangelical Witness Into Orbit," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 7 February 1969, 2-4.

²² Myron S. Augsburg, "Renewal of Social Concern Among Evangelicals," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 3 April 1970, 2-3, 8.

²³ Henry H. Dick, "New Birth of Freedom for Evangelicals," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 17 October 1969, 12-14.

mission organizations, and the National Association of Evangelicals. It is not surprising then that the *Herald* would carry many articles endorsing the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. A close look at the minutes of Board meetings and the comments found in the *Herald* indicates a predominantly positive reaction to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and evangelicalism itself. The motive for joining the EFC seems, however, to be as much utilitarian as it does spiritual and at times their lack of concern about EFC doctrinal statements is surprising. As we look at the history of the Mennonite Brethren we will see that the period of the late 1960's and early 1970's was the beginning of a period of ferment in which the Mennonite Brethren relationship to evangelicalism was an ever present subject of discussion. It seems appropriate then that we begin with the Mennonite Brethren's push to formally join the first national evangelical organization in Canada.

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION TO JOIN THE EFC

We begin with the most formal of records: yearbooks and board meeting minutes. The first reference to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada in official Conference minutes appears in the records of a BORAC meeting held in early July, 1968. Under the heading *Social Concerns and Inter-Church Relations* two tiny lines of script record that a motion was carried in which the members agreed that the Conference should encourage individual membership in the EFC.²⁴ If any debate or concerns on this issue were discussed the

²⁴ *Minutes of the Board of Reference and Counsel, Canadian Conference: July 5-6, 1968*, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. 3.

secretary did not record it. One year later this same committee met and again the topic of the EFC was briefly discussed. Here the minutes record that BORAC recommended the endorsement of the EFC because the Board perceived the need for a united evangelical voice. Included in the minutes is a letter which H.G. Baerg prepared for the churches. There is an expressed concern that the letter make clear that membership in the EFC is endorsed but that it is left to the individual or the individual church. The letter itself reveals that the reason the Board is sending out a recommendation is because they have received inquiries from several churches for "clarification and direction in regards to the appeal of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada".²⁵ This letter describes the EFC as a "united evangelical witness in Canada".

Nature of the Discussion

Several observations may be made here. First, the desire to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada seems to come from the "bottom", the church constituency rather than from its executive heads. The executive board, however, seems to be in complete agreement with the desires of the constituency in this matter. Second, the amount of discussion by the executive boards on this topic is almost non-existent. Topics such as the peace position of the Mennonite Central Committee often take up pages of recorded debate and discussion in the minutes of the meetings. The lack of discussion in regards to the EFC could indicate that the committee viewed the joining of the EFC as quite minor or that they

²⁵ *Minutes of the Board of Reference and Counsel, Canadian Conference: January 17-18, 1969, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. 2, Attachment.*

knew much about the EFC and were in whole-hearted agreement with this organization. The report found in the 1969 Canadian Conference Yearbook states that the "matter of relationship with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has been studied,"²⁶ however, the minutes of the meeting do not indicate a study of much detail. Indeed there is no entry which would indicate that the topic of the EFC received anything more than the barest amount of explanation or study. Later minutes will record that the perception of the united nature of the EFC were perhaps not what the Mennonite Brethren had hoped for.

In its beginning the EFC was not open to membership by entire denominations. This was to change in the early 1970's. When the EFC did open up membership to whole religious bodies, the Mennonite Brethren of Canada again had to decide what action to take as a Conference. Thus, in 1972 the minutes of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concern record a question regarding whether to join the EFC as a denomination. It was agreed that F.C. Peters, a member of that Board, would obtain information concerning annual membership costs, doctrinal statements and other items for future meetings.

The question recorded immediately prior to the EFC issue is one in which the Board asked who was responsible for explaining the Mennonite Brethren positions on doctrine to other groups or denominations. In the discussion of this question there seems to be some concern that individuals representing the Mennonite Brethren were presenting doctrinal views to other groups and denominations without consulting the Conference leadership. Though the two issues were not presented as related in the minutes one wonders about the

²⁶ *Yearbook of the 59th Convention the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America*, 42.

concern of the representation of Mennonite Brethren views at the same time as the process of joining the EFC is discussed.²⁷ The concern for doctrine expressed here makes it more surprising that at the next meeting the discussion regarding the EFC included only talk of the cost of membership. Doctrinal issues, if debated, were not recorded.²⁸ This silence seems to speak of unanimous agreement with the doctrinal position of the EFC. The recommendation by J.A. Toews that the Mennonite Brethren join the EFC was carried without further comment. BOSSC was supposed to discuss the doctrinal statement of the EFC but never did.

The yearbook of the annual summer convention states that BOSSC had studied the relationship between the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and the EFC and recommended that they join this organization. Once again the tiny amount of information recorded about the EFC can hardly amount to a study of that organization. The cost of such a decision is again discussed in both BOSSC's report and as part of their comments in their resolution without mention of any other aspect of the EFC. Only in the final comments of the BOSSC report are the objectives of the EFC summarized in two brief lines: "to give a united voice to the evangelical cause in Canada" and "to strengthen the cause of the evangelical churches in Canada." It was decided that the Conference would join the EFC for a period of two years and in the interim would review this position and

²⁷ *Minutes of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concern, Canadian Conference: January 15, 1972*, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. 1-2.

²⁸ *Minutes of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concern, Canadian Conference: January 12-14, 1973*, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. 1-2.

make further recommendations in 1975.²⁹ The possibility of a clash of doctrinal ideas between the two organizations never came up.

With very little discussion of the matter; discussion that was more concerned with money matters than with the doctrinal positions of the EFC, the Mennonite Brethren joined a national evangelical body. The very absence of deliberation on this point seems to be an indication of how comfortable the Mennonite Brethren were with identifying themselves as evangelicals and of their desire to associate with other evangelicals. That not one item of doctrine should be mentioned is shocking considering how very important doctrinal issues appear to be to the Mennonite Brethren. When reading through yearbooks of the period one continually comes across topics of doctrine which are subjects of continuous debate. In 1968, for example, the minutes of the meetings record the arguments about the doctrinal stance that MCC had taken in its Peace Position. Yet not a word was said about peace issues when joining the EFC even though evangelicals have often held positions antithetical to the traditional Mennonite Brethren position of non-violence. It seems that the Mennonite Brethren had little, if any, trouble perceiving themselves as evangelicals and desired to be part of the greater evangelical fellowship of Canada. Any theological or doctrinal differences that the Mennonite Brethren knew of at that time were not considered important enough to prevent the Conference leaders from endorsing the EFC.

It is hard to determine from the minutes of the meetings why BOSSC decided to join the EFC only for a trial period of two years. The two year period in which the EFC

²⁹ *Yearbook of the 63rd Convention of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: The Christian Press, 1973), 3, 8-10.

organization was to be investigated seems to be a prudent course of action. Yet in 1975, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1982 and 1983 the same type of resolution was made. The yearbooks in each of these years record the Conference decision to join the EFC but the motion was to join only for a given period of time, either one or two years, after which point the Conference would re-evaluate the EFC and the Mennonite Brethren Conference involvement in it. At the end of each trial period a subsequent recommendation is made to retain the Conference membership in the EFC but virtually no evaluation of the EFC is given. One wonders why the trial period is continued if very little objection is raised against the EFC. After 1983 the issue of membership in the EFC does not come up again. This decade long trial period constitutes the strongest hesitation in the push to join the EFC that can be found; if it can even be called that.

Limited Negative Evaluation of the EFC

Two notable exceptions to this lack of evaluation of the EFC come from the minutes of the meetings of BOSSC in 1975 and 1976. The minutes of 1975 record that the Board was trying to understand what kind of involvement the Conference had in this organization and to whom did the EFC relate within the Conference. They wondered if their only obligation was to pay the annual membership fee and felt that the Conference ought to be represented at the EFC's annual business meetings. The minutes, unfortunately, do not record any answers that may have been given to the questions. The minutes do, however, report that the Board was disappointed by the weak image of both the EFC and of its

official paper, *Thrust*. Never-the-less, the minutes report that the Board concluded that despite this disappointment, they felt they should continue to belong to an evangelical group that seeks to make an impact on all of Canada. Thus, the Board decided to continue its membership and send its Moderator to the EFC annual meeting and report back.³⁰

The minutes of 1976 record that 'report back'. F.C. Peters, the moderator at that time who attended the EFC annual meeting, gave a tough evaluation of the EFC. In his estimation the EFC had considerable problems relating to the geography of Canada and did not enjoy support from all evangelical groups in Canada. But he also believed that the Conference should continue membership in the EFC and support it and give it time to grow. The board agreed to Peters's recommendation of continued support.³¹ This evaluation indicates that the Mennonite Brethren Conference was starting to get a feel for how unified and encompassing a voice the EFC really had. The Conference endorsed joining the EFC in 1973 because they believed it could be a united voice for all Canadian evangelicals. By 1975 they found that the situation was not completely as they hoped. The organization seemed weak and unable to represent the various geographical areas of Canada or many of the denominations. This would be a significant disappointment for the Mennonite Brethren who were at that time trying to accomplish those goals as well. The Mennonite Brethren Mission Board, which had a long history of church planting in the four Western provinces,

³⁰ *Minutes of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concern, Canadian Conference: January 3-4, 1975*, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. 3.

³¹ *Minutes of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concern, Canadian Conference: July 2, 1976* Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. 4.

was in the process of church planting in Quebec³² and was beginning to send Christian Service workers to the Atlantic provinces.³³ It saw these regions as important mission fields. The minutes discussed above indicate how important it was to the Mennonite Brethren that all geographical areas of Canada be reached and be united by evangelical organizations. This seems like surprisingly nationalistic thinking on the part of a people group that had a history of moving from one country to another and who often viewed the country they were living in more like a host than a home. Furthermore, the evaluation of the EFC was not based on possible conflicts between their Anabaptist emphases and evangelical leanings.

The executive boards of the Mennonite Brethren Conference were elected to make decisions and take action on behalf of the Conference as a whole. As a result, investigating the actions of the Conference boards give a glimpse of the thoughts of the Conference as a whole. It was noted above that it was the inquiries of various churches and individuals which caused the Conference to make its formal statements. In this instance at least, the constituency seemed to be leading its executive. Yearbooks and minutes provide only a skeleton of information. They are helpful for keeping chronology straight but other sources provide more insight into what the constituency of the Mennonite Brethren of Canada thought, or at least were being told, about evangelicalism, and in particular, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

³²David Franco, "Growth By Sharing In Quebec," in *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 30 November 1973, 15.

³³Paul Neufeld, "After Six Years in Nova Scotia," in *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 2 April 1971, 13-14.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE *MENNONITE BROTHERS HERALD*

The *Herald* is without question the most important mouthpiece of the Mennonite Brethren of Canada. It is the paper that is read by most of the members. Articles of opinion and information, which often express various and sometimes conflicting points of view, provide a forum for discussion. And the constituency is rarely quiet about what is written in the *Herald*. The letters to the editor more often than not continue to provide a lively forum for debate. The *Herald*, at times, has become a place where Mennonite Brethren, laymen, clergy and scholars alike, argue and debate on theological, ethical and practical issues.

Harold Jantz

The most detailed plea to join the EFC came from the pen of Harold Jantz, who was the editor of the *Herald* during this era. Although many news features within the *Herald* kept the Mennonite Brethren informed about the events and conferences of Canadian evangelicals, Jantz's editorials went beyond mere news reporting in order to try to persuade the Mennonite Brethren to join the EFC. Such an editorial appeared in March of 1969. In this editorial Jantz reports what he had experienced when he attended the EFC convention. He seems most excited about the "unabashed evangelical stance" that he felt permeated the convention. He also takes pains to emphasize the broad spectrum of evangelicals, such as Anglicans, Pentecostals, and Christian Reformed that participated in the event. Jantz also reports that Frank C. Peters, the Moderator of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren

Conference at that time, was one of the speakers. With the exception of the title and the last sentence of the article, this editorial has the flavor of a news report. He does not present an argument for *why* the Mennonite Brethren should join the EFC but merely asserts that it is his "strong conviction that the Mennonite Brethren ought to get behind the EFC with all the resources they can bring to it."³⁴

Jantz's editorial in the November, 1971 *Herald* focuses on the "crucial issues" which then prevented the EFC from effectively meeting its goals. Problems such as the vast spread of the country, the lack of full-time executive members and the question of whether to allow entire denominations to join hampered the effectiveness of the EFC. These problems are not reason enough for the Mennonite Brethren Conference to abandon the EFC, rather Jantz sees these as reasons why the Mennonite Brethren should increase their prayer support for the organization.³⁵ While neither of these two editorials explains why the Mennonite Brethren should join the EFC, in April and May of 1972 Jantz finally gives a detailed argument explaining why the Mennonite Brethren should do so. After again reporting the problems of the EFC, which included a lack of funds, a dwindling attendance at annual conventions and a transient leadership, Jantz states that the EFC is needed. "Evangelicals must become aware of each other" in order to speak to the various levels of government, in order that evangelicals in Newfoundland might know of the work of Christ in their brother in Christ in Vancouver, and in order to provide resources to churches and

³⁴ Harold Jantz, "Evangelical Fellowship of Canada - Let's Get With It," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 21 March 1969, 11.

³⁵ Harold Jantz, "EFC Facing Crucial Issues," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 5 November 1971, 11.

individuals in various situations. Jantz's summary states the matter more passionately. He declares that since "we know ourselves to be evangelicals, we should have no hesitation to join fellow evangelicals in [the EFC]." Evangelicals should seek partnership in order to say to society and government what evangelicals stand for. Jantz cites the position taken by the EFC in the right of the unborn fetus as an example of an evangelical position in which a joint evangelical alliance could influence government legislation.³⁶ In his May editorial, Jantz presents a strong argument for the need for the Mennonite Brethren to associate with other Christian groups, both other evangelicals and other Mennonites. The bulk of this editorial deals with the hesitation that the Mennonite Brethren felt towards other Mennonite groups, which seems to indicate that there was much more acceptance of other evangelicals than of other Mennonites. Although Jantz does pen a paragraph trying to allay the fears of any who perceived the EFC as detrimental to the unique witness of the Mennonite Brethren there does not seem to be much else that would impede a relationship with the EFC.³⁷

John Redekop

John Redekop did, and frequently still does contribute to the *Herald* and is most known for his opinion column. Although John Redekop has much to say about evangelicalism and many other topics, he has only one opinion column in which he discusses the EFC during the period from 1968-1974. Like Jantz, Redekop emphasizes

³⁶ Harold Jantz, "Historic Moment in the EFC's Life," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 7 April 1972, 11.

³⁷ Harold Jantz, "We Need Other Associations," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 5 May 1972, 9.

whole-hearted endorsement of the EFC, an endorsement which is much more radical than Jantz's. Redekop is very concerned that the EFC begin to function effectively. He too mentions the problems which beset the EFC, but emphasizes the problem of denominational differences. Redekop perceived an "unwillingness to stress essentials and overlook those differences which are of little consequence" among the participants of the EFC. Redekop urges members of the EFC to stop using the EFC conventions as a forum for displaying "peculiarities and labels" and to "relegate denominationalism to its proper subordinate place." Even though at the end of his piece Redekop pleads with his readers to "cooperate without crucial compromise" it is not clear what he means by this statement.³⁸ The article does not indicate what is essential nor what list of denominational distinctives need to be subordinated. Redekop is strongly advocating an evangelical alliance in the EFC that does not over-emphasize differences between evangelical groups.

Letters to the Editor

Jantz and Redekop wrote about the EFC in the Herald. One of the main functions of the Herald is to provide a forum for discussion of ideas among the constituents of the Mennonite Brethren. As a result, the letters to the Herald editor are numerous and often comment on the issues which are presented in the Herald. The letters can be heated and passionate. What is surprising when reading through the issues that follow the articles by Jantz and Redekop is the virtually complete absence of letters to the editor on the topic of the EFC. Though it is dangerous to argue from silence, the following suggestions may be

³⁸ John Redekop, "EFC," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 20 March 1970, 8.

valid. The lack of comment on the EFC articles indicates that there was widespread agreement with the views of Jantz and Redekop. What these two wrote was understood to be the logical and acceptable position to hold. If this hypothesis is true, then the Mennonite Brethren constituency is displaying here an astonishingly high level of comfort with evangelicalism and with viewing themselves as evangelicals. Those who read the Herald must have agreed with Jantz that they both perceived themselves as evangelicals and that they wanted to join with other evangelicals to create a united voice. They must have agreed with Redekop that their own Mennonite Brethren denominational distinctives should be subordinated in order to create this united evangelical voice.

COMPARING THE MB DECISION WITH OTHER MENNONITES

Investigating the Mennonite Brethren decision to join the EFC reveals that the Mennonite Brethren considered themselves to be evangelicals and that they greatly desired to be part of the wider evangelical movement within Canada. While one might be tempted to see this as an uninteresting point, one has only to look at other Mennonite groups in Canada to realize that the Mennonite Brethren were quite different in their acceptance of evangelicalism. Whereas the Mennonite Brethren expressed openness and acceptance of the EFC, the Conference of Mennonites, sometimes referred to as General Conference, expressed great concern and unease with the mandate and guiding ideas of the EFC. In an unpublished paper, Helmut Harder of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, a Conference of

Mennonites school, reflects on the various areas in which traditional Mennonite theology conflicts with the theological foundations of the EFC.³⁹ He outlines how traditional Mennonite theology differs from the EFC's concept of "the nation" and its preoccupation with a national agenda, the tendency by the EFC to devalue "good works" and their lack of commitment to peace theology.⁴⁰ Harder explains that Mennonites have not been concerned with the concept of the nation and have, in fact, strongly emphasized the separation of Church and State. Mennonites have been passionate about helping those in need in every way possible and believe in the necessity of "good works". Finally, Mennonites have long held to their ideas of non-violence, peace theology and social justice. These are all areas which Harder believes are important enough to the Conference of Mennonites to warrant serious attention before the Conference of Mennonites would consider joining the EFC.

How very different an approach this is than that of the Mennonite Brethren. This piece by Harder could actually be considered a serious study of the EFC, something which the Mennonite Brethren claimed to do of the EFC but for which there seems to be no evidence that it was ever conducted. Yet, as we shall see in the coming chapters, the embrace of evangelicalism caused much tension in the coming decades. In the 1970's and 1980's the Mennonite Brethren struggled to understand what kind of religious

³⁹Rodney J. Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity: The Dynamics of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1987), 57-77. Helmut Harder's evaluation of the EFC and the Canadian Council of Churches seems to echo some of the themes of Sawatsky's evaluation of the liberal and evangelical influences within the General Conference.

⁴⁰Helmut Harder, "Canadian Council of Churches and Evangelical Fellowship of Canada in Theological Perspective" (Canadian Mennonite Bible College: Unpublished paper, 1989, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies and Archives, Paper and Essays, Box 19, Folder B, No. 4), 10-18.

self-understanding they had. Some saw little tension between their embrace of Anabaptism and evangelicalism, some preferred to be critical of Anabaptism and some were wary of evangelicalism. In summary, the increasing desire to associate with evangelicals set the stage for long period of debate.

CHAPTER 3

ANABAPTISM: DEBATE ABOUT RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

The tension and debate concerning the Mennonite Brethren relationship to evangelicalism was also manifested in the area of historical interpretation. During the period under investigation the Mennonite Brethren re-examined their heritage. The role that evangelical groups had played in the formation of the Mennonite Brethren church was central to this scholarly conversation. This chapter will discuss the different interpretations of the historical influence of evangelicalism, as put forward by various Mennonite Brethren historians, and show how their explanations of their past relationships with evangelicalism were an attempt to set the tone for their present associations with evangelicalism.

Two years after the Mennonite Brethren Conference joined the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Board of Christian Literature, one of the three boards of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren, published a comprehensive history of the Mennonite Brethren Church. By 1975, the year this book was published, the Canadian Mennonite Brethren believed themselves to be in the midst of an identity crisis. The *Herald* frequently published articles addressing the topic of their identity. The letters to the editor on the issue of religious self-understanding were as numerous as they were passionate. It

was into this ferment that the Board of Christian Literature commissioned a series of books which would investigate and interpret the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church. High on the priority of all those who wrote about this history was the examination of the relationship of the Mennonite Brethren and evangelicalism.

VICTOR ADRIAN: STRONG TIES TO EVANGELICALISM

"Born of Anabaptism and Pietism"

A work by Victor Adrian pre-dates the commissions of the 1970's but should be studied as a precursor of the identity crisis. Adrian wrote about the beginnings of the Mennonite Brethren Church in order to advocate a close relationship with evangelicalism. An extended article on this topic appeared as a special eleven page insert in the *Herald* in 1965,¹ one year after the beginning of the EFC. The title of the insert is indicative of its central argument, namely that the Mennonite Brethren Church is a product of both Anabaptism and Pietism. Adrian begins his article by launching an attack on the ideas of Robert Friedmann² and Ernst Crous.³ Friedmann argued that Anabaptism and Pietism are essentially different and Adrian intends to demonstrate that this is an incorrect view. Adrian also argues with Crous's belief that Pietism, on balance, has had a negative effect on the

¹ Victor Adrian, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 26 March 1965, 1-11.

² Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949).

³ Ernst Crous, "Anabaptism, Pietism, Rationalism and German Mennonites," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957).

Anabaptists. Rather, Adrian argues that the Mennonite Brethren Church is an example of how well Anabaptism and Pietism complement each other.

To accomplish this task Adrian re-investigates the writings of none other than P.M. Friesen, the patriarch of Mennonite Brethren historians. Adrian understands P.M. Friesen to have seen Anabaptism and Pietism as complementary. Based on Friesen's high regard for Eduard Hugo Otto Wuest, Adrian concludes that P.M. Friesen saw Pietism as a "wholesome and beneficial movement"⁴ Using a key sentence of Friesen's text as a springboard, Adrian further argues that Friesen saw Pietism as the complement to Mennonitism.⁵ The thrust of Adrian's historical inquiry is to show his contemporary Mennonite Brethren that the joining of evangelical Pietism and Mennonite Anabaptism was present from the very beginning and "this is an historic fact."⁶ Consequently, the Mennonite Brethren should not view evangelical Pietism as something alien to Anabaptism but should cherish and cultivate it.

In fact he argues that the Mennonite Brethren Church is not a mere continuation of Menno Simons's original vision but rather a mixture of doctrines of both Mennonitism and evangelical Pietism. Thus, the message Adrian presents to the Canadian Mennonite Brethren seems to be that the Mennonite Brethren are not just Mennonites but also part of a significant evangelical stream. The Mennonite Brethren, therefore, have a dual religious self-understanding. Note Adrian's words; "Eighteen brethren signed the document of

⁴Victor Adrian, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," 2.

⁵Ibid., 3. Friesen's words, in translation, were; "Evangelical Pietism in the wholesome kernel of its essence is...the critique and complement of Lutheranism."

⁶Ibid.

secession on January 6, 1860. The Mennonite Brethren Church was born - a child of Anabaptism and Pietism"⁷ Adrian emphasizes that comprehending the dual roots of the Mennonite Brethren Church is crucial for understanding the characteristics of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the present. Adrian's article would have been sent to all the households of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada. As a result, the idea that the Mennonite Brethren Church had a dual religious heritage was quickly disseminated throughout Canadian Mennonite Brethren. It is little wonder then that a crisis of religious identity was soon to follow.

At the time Adrian's article was published most of the adherents of the Mennonite Brethren Churches probably knew very little about the Baptist and Pietist influences on the Mennonite Brethren Church, especially in its formative years of the nineteenth century.⁸ Adrian gives several pages of information briefly highlighting the ways in which Pietist and Baptist ideas positively influenced the Mennonite Brethren Church. Although he states that P.M. Friesen was aware of the weakness of Pietism, Adrian does not list any specific ways in which Pietism may have had a negative effect on the Mennonite Brethren.⁹ This is not the case, interestingly, when Adrian discusses the influence of fundamentalism. In fact, the opposite is true. Adrian assures his readers that fundamentalism was valuable for a time and to some degree (implying that it is no longer of much value) but then lists several specific

⁷Ibid., 6.

⁸Harry Loewen, "A Case For Studying Our Spiritual History," *Herald* 26 May 1978, 32.

⁹Although Adrian mentions the influence of ideas which are often regarded as negative by other Mennonite scholars, such as Darbyism and so forth, Adrian refrains from critiquing these ideas.

areas in which fundamentalism was weak, for example, in its defense of doctrines that the movement failed to develop in helpful ways even while ardently arguing for their truth. Perhaps Adrian's harshest evaluation of fundamentalism can be summed up in his words, "the Church cannot grow on the fare of Fundamentalism."¹⁰ Adrian's statement comes at the end of a long section in which he notes that the most important characteristic of the Mennonite Brethren Church is its progressivism. Adrian defines progressivism as an awareness of a universal Church which results in a readiness to fellowship with non-Mennonites.¹¹ Again, the characteristic of progressivism can be traced back to the very earliest days of the Mennonite Brethren Church as exemplified in their relationship to the Pietists. Adrian's strong critique of fundamentalism would seem to imply that Mennonite Brethren progressivism does not uncritically extend to fundamentalism.

Adrian's spirit of progressivism does not seem to extend to other Mennonite groups much more strongly than it does to fundamentalism. Adrian observes that for most of its history the Mennonite Brethren Church has been more intimate with Baptists and other evangelicals than with other Mennonites.¹² When discussing the tensions that existed among the Mennonite Brethren and other Mennonite groups, Adrian gives only a brief plea for greater association with other Mennonites, saying "One would wish that the precedent established in 1875 in holding faith conferences to which believers from various denominations were invited could be carried out today on all levels in the various Mennonite churches with the hope...that the truth conquer - that Christ's Lordship be more

¹⁰ Victor Adrian, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," 8.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Ibid., 7.

freely established."¹³ What he means by truth conquering and establishing Christ's Lordship is left unexplained.

Adrian's article is, therefore, not a plea for greater association with the more extreme faction of evangelicalism, as witnessed by his comments concerning fundamentalism, nor is it a plea for greater association with other Mennonites. Perhaps the above sentence forms too harsh a statement. Adrian's criticisms of fundamentalism and his stand-offishness towards other Mennonites may be a caution to the Mennonite Brethren to remain critical of other movements while at the same time continuing in the spirit of progressivism. If this is the case, Adrian's lack of an evaluation of evangelical Pietism is even more regrettable as he fails to evaluate the movement he most strongly encourages embracing.

Regardless, Adrian's paper is an attempt to show how, historically, the Mennonite Brethren Church was positively intertwined with one of the main streams of evangelicalism and how this knowledge should goad Mennonite Brethren towards greater fellowship with other evangelicals. Adrian argues that the spirit of progressivism, that is the openness to fellowship with other Christian movements, must "reassert itself lest sterility and superficiality take its place."¹⁴ The fact that Adrian's progressivism does not seem to extend to fundamentalism or other Mennonites but exclusively to evangelicalism might suggest that some kind of agenda is driving the ideas of his paper, perhaps the need to explain or even justify a close relationship to evangelicalism.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

"Anabaptist or Evangelical?"

Adrian's plea for greater association with evangelicals is made more pointedly in an article published in the *Herald* a few years later.¹⁵ Again this article uses an analysis of history to show how the Mennonite Brethren have been evangelicals since their beginnings. The answer to Adrian's own question, "is it possible to be an evangelical and also a true Anabaptist?" concludes with these words: "My point is that the Anabaptist and evangelical have much in common. Both the Anabaptist and the evangelical need to learn from each other...There is a biblical ecumenism which constrains the Christian to seek his brother. It is for this reason that I - an Anabaptist - wish to identify with evangelicals in our country as well as elsewhere."¹⁶ Though one is left wondering how far past the evangelical camp Adrian's ecumenism would extend, Adrian's clear advocacy of a closer relationship with other evangelical groups would certainly help pave the way for a unanimous agreement by the Mennonite Brethren Church for joining the EFC. Such thinking could also pave the way for a crisis of religious self-understanding.

J.A. TOEWS: STRONG TIES TO ANABAPTISM

During this time came the realization that the Mennonite Brethren Church needed to develop a greater historical awareness of its own roots. As early as 1970, an open letter, written by P.J. Klassen, chair of the Historical Commission, was published in the *Herald*. In

¹⁵ Victor Adrian, "Anabaptist or Evangelical?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 30 October 1970, 16-17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

this letter Klassen informs the readers that in 1969 the General Conference initiated the formation of the Historical Commission in order to create "an understanding and appreciation of Mennonite Brethren History."¹⁷ The introduction to the first book which the Commission sponsored, J.A. Toews's *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, puts it more bluntly. Here the editor, A.J. Klassen, says, "the need for an up-to-date history was born in the crisis of the search for identity that has become so apparent in the life of the Church during the last decade or two."¹⁸ With this book the Mennonite Brethren began a process of investigating and interpreting their religious past in an effort to guide them through their present.

The Historical Commission asked J.A. Toews to produce a sequel to P.M. Friesen's *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruederschaft in Russland*. Friesen's work was commissioned by the Mennonite Brethren brotherhood twenty years after the Church began as a twenty-fifth anniversary tribute. Friesen's monumental account was not completed until 1910. Toews's task was to write a history that would cover the entire history of the church just as Friesen's task had done.¹⁹ To this day, Toews's book remains the book which most fully chronicles the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Knowing the context and milieu into which his book would enter, it is interesting to observe what Toews writes about the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren and evangelicals, in the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

¹⁷ P.J. Klassen, "An Open Letter to the Brotherhood," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 11 December 1970, 24.

¹⁸ J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, vii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church

J.A. Toews's work, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, has been criticized for under-emphasizing the influence and importance of Pietists, Baptists and evangelicalism on the Mennonite Brethren Church. This criticism is largely warranted and stands in contrast to the works of other historians such as Adrian who was discussed previously and J.B. Toews whose work will be discussed later. Even if it is granted that J.A. Toews was under considerable restriction in regards to space, the mere six pages he spends describing the influence of Baptists and Pietists and other factors which brought about the "revival movement" of the Mennonite Brethren is quite sparse. In the conclusion of his section on earlier renewal movements Toews writes that the thrust of his analysis is a refutation of the idea that the Mennonite Brethren Church was born of Anabaptism and Pietism; a direct reference to Adrian's article by this name.²⁰

Toews's strongest argument against Adrian's conclusions seems to stem from Toews's interpretation of Eduard Wuest. Wuest is considered by virtually all Mennonite Brethren historians, past and present, to be the single most influential person in the birthing of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Wuest preached extensively among the Mennonite colonies, especially Molotschna, and some of his Mennonite supporters later founded the Mennonite Brethren Church. P.M. Friesen regarded Wuest as the second reformer, after Menno, of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Toews acknowledges that the early Mennonite Brethren had a strong regard for Wuest but Toews interprets Wuest's untimely death in 1859, one year before the official founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church, as

²⁰ J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 32, 441 n. 23.

providential. Toews compares Wuest to Moses of the Old Testament as someone who "led many people out of the bondage of a lifeless tradition and dead orthodoxy...[but who was] not equipped to be a Joshua to lead these redeemed people into the promised land."²¹ The cause of this inability to lead the Mennonite Brethren, according to Toews, was the fact that Wuest did not introduce believer's baptism but remained a pedo-baptists until the end. As a result Toews evaluates Wuest in the same manner as Luther; both were unable to bring their original vision into actual realization. Presumably Toews means that neither Luther nor Wuest brought their churches to the logical conclusion that the Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century Reformation did, that is, a believer's church. After Wuest's death, Toews argues, the orphaned Brethren were forced to find their orientation "in their historic Anabaptist tradition and the study of the New Testament"²² and not in Pietism. Toews wants to concede that evangelical Pietism had a good influence on the Mennonites of Russia but also to urge that the influence of such people should not be unduly emphasized.

Toews's treatment of Tobias Voth, another person very influential in the early renewal movements among the Mennonites, is another example of the way Toews downplays the role of Pietism on the Mennonite Brethren. The only hint of the Pietist nature of Voth in Toews's writings comes in the comment, "Voth...had been converted through Jung Stilling's writings."²³ For readers who did not know that Jung Stilling was an influential Pietist, the significance of this comment would be lost. The importance of Voth for Toews is not the Pietist ideas or influence he may or may not have brought to the

²¹ Ibid., 31.

²² Ibid., 32.

²³ Ibid., 27.

Mennonite Brethren Church, but rather that Voth brought about the practice of intimate Christian fellowship among the Brethren, a concept which the Mennonite Brethren called 'brotherhood'.²⁴ For Toews the concept of church as a brotherhood is a Mennonite distinctive.

"In Search of Identity"

J.A. Toews does not make a direct critique of evangelicalism in his book but an article that appeared in the *Herald* some time before the publication of *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* makes clear what Toews's assessment of evangelicalism was. Toews evaluates the identity crisis of that time and lays most of the blame for the occurrence of the crisis on the Mennonite Brethren relationship to evangelicalism. Toews toys with the idea that the problem of identity could be "partly inherent in the origin and development of the Mennonite Brethren Church" because the Mennonite Brethren were "Mennonite in doctrine, Pietistic in spirit and Baptist in organization."²⁵ Toews does not expand this idea, however, but instead advances other causes for the crisis of identity as being significant.

The first possible cause of the identity crisis is the lack of an historically shaped self-consciousness. Toews claims that it is the members who have little knowledge of their spiritual heritage who suggest a change of name as a solution to the current identity crisis.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ J.A. Toews, "In Search of Identity," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 10 March 1972, 2.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

Not surprisingly, Toews believes that a name change would not solve the problem. The last two possible causes Toews lists are a direct attack on the courtship affair that the Mennonite Brethren have with evangelicalism. He writes, "Our present identity-crisis is largely the result of our exposure to every wind of doctrine from various theological schools of thought."²⁷ The schools of thought which he lists seem to be mostly those of evangelicalism, for example, Toews states that Bible schools are influenced by hyper-dispensationalism and hyper-Calvinism and that Sunday Schools reject materials with an Anabaptist orientation in favor of Scripture Press publications. Finally, Toews accuses the Mennonite Brethren of a desire to identify with popular evangelicalism as a way of getting rid of the embarrassment of having been a poor, uneducated, immigrant group. As Mennonite Brethren became wealthy and educated they wanted to join a Christian sub-culture that was mainstream and "with it".²⁸ While many Canadians might not view evangelicalism as mainstream or "with it" many Mennonite Brethren apparently did.

In his article Toews goes one step further than in his book. He uses the words of P.M. Friesen to show that Friesen himself was not as accepting of the evangelical influences as Victor Adrian earlier contended. Toews provides a long quotation by Friesen in which Friesen says that he is "tired, tired, tired of the foreign influences" and tells his contemporaries that by accepting these foreign influences they are "losing a large and essential part of [their] Mennonite framework."²⁹ Toews quotes C. Krahn who wrote that the early Mennonite Brethren did not want to be Pietistic nor Baptist but Mennonite.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

Toews's perception of the negative effect of evangelicalism on the Mennonite Brethren explains, perhaps in part, why his treatment of evangelical Pietism in his book is so minimal. He probably knew his book would be used as a textbook for many classes in the Mennonite Brethren Bible Schools and Colleges. Perhaps he hoped a minimal emphasis on evangelical influence would help ease the polarization which Toews perceived to be growing in the Mennonite Brethren Church. Toews observes that the Mennonite Brethren Church was dividing among those who favored close ties with fellow Mennonites and those who embraced North American evangelicalism. If anything the re-interpretation of the past in order to advocate an identity in the present would only add to the polarization between the Brethren. The interpretation of the past is a flexible craft and as we have already seen with the work of Adrian and Toews different conclusions can be obtained from the same sources in order to promote different positions. It seems that far from clearing up the confusion of religious self-understanding the investigation of the past added to the crisis.

Evaluating the Influence of J.A. Toews

Nearly fifteen years later Peter Penner wrote a book chronicling the church planting efforts in Canada by the Mennonite Brethren. Penner describes the identity debate of the 1970's in his ruminations on the Church planting efforts. Penner perceived Toews's article *In Search of Identity* and the furious response it received as a touch point of the identity crisis.³¹ The attacks which Penner refers to are letters to the editor which were published in

³⁰ Ibid., 1.

³¹ Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length*, 155.

the *Herald*. H.R. Baerg, then president of Winkler Bible Institute, a post-secondary teaching center of the Mennonite Brethren Church, accused J.A. Toews of being pre-1860 in his interpretation of identity.³² Penner sees Baerg's attack as a criticism not only of Toews but of the founding fathers of the Mennonite Brethren Church as well.³³ Baerg saw Toews as too Mennonite and not sufficiently evangelical. Nor did Victor Adrian stay out of the fray. Adrian's letter commenting on Toews's article indicates that he wanted to find his identity primarily in the New Testament and secondarily from any other tradition which might provide helpful visions to the Church, be they Baptist, Pietist or Anabaptist sources.³⁴ Letters to the editor concerning J.A. Toews's article and letters commenting on the letters to the editor filled the *Herald*. Not only did scholars like Harry Loewen comment³⁵ and the Conference Moderator, Frank C. Peters feel it necessary to plead for peace and understanding³⁶ but lay people and students wrote in as well.³⁷ The content of the letters indicates that if Toews only suspected a growing polarization among the Mennonite Brethren Church in regards to evangelical and Mennonite identities, the responses to his article confirmed it. It is clear that the publication of J.A. Toews's book began a period in

³² H.R. Baerg, "Pre-1860," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 7 April 1972, 10.

³³ Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length*, 155.

³⁴ Victor Adrian, "Recovery of the New Testament Vision," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 2 June 1972, 8, 25-26.

³⁵ Harry Loewen, "Identity Crisis," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 5 May 1972, 25.

³⁶ Frank C. Peters, "Brethren Must Trust One Another," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 5 May 1972, 8.

³⁷ J.M. Klassen, "Identify With the Anabaptists," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 7 April 1972, 10.

Ronald Friesen, William Wall and Michael Wiebe, "What Does an Anabaptist Mean in an Urban Society?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 21 April 1972, 24-25.

which one of the areas in which the relationship to evangelicalism would be fought out was in the retelling of Mennonite Brethren history.

One final observation on the work of J.A. Toews and an important tie with the previous chapter is necessary here. The minutes of the meeting of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns of January 15, 1972 indicate that not only was J.A. Toews present at the meeting but that he asked questions on at least one issue. For example, the minutes record that J.A. Toews discussed the issue of membership of non-immersed believers. At this meeting the question whether or not to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada was also discussed. If J.A. Toews raised any strong objections to the pursuit of joining this organization, the secretary of the meeting failed to record them.³⁸ Furthermore, the minutes of a meeting held one year later state that J.A. Toews himself made the recommendation to join the EFC.³⁹ What is going on here? His article on this topic is written in the same year as this meeting of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns is held. In articles published in the *Herald* Toews loudly proclaims that the reason the Mennonites are experiencing an identity crisis is because of their acceptance of evangelical influences. Yet, at decision-making meetings it appears that Toews is silent when it comes to joining the EFC.

Harry Loewen also observes this apparent ambiguity. In a succinct article Loewen discusses the ambivalent relationship that exists between the Mennonite Brethren and

³⁸ *Minutes of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concern, Canadian Conference: January 15, 1972*, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. f.i.

³⁹ *Minutes of the Board of Spiritual and Social Concern, Canadian Conference: January 12-14, 1973*, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Correspondence and Minutes, Box B220, pg. 2.

evangelicalism. He comments that histories such as J.A. Toews's book assess men like Wuest and the influences of Pietism and Baptists in ambivalent ways. On the one hand they call Wuest a Moses and on the other hand they see him as not quite adequate to be a Joshua.⁴⁰ And although many Mennonite Brethren want to maintain their ties with their Mennonite religious families Loewen observes that the characteristic of ambivalence is apparent in the Mennonite Brethren avoidance of working together with other Mennonite groups but an eagerness to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.⁴¹ Loewen believes that the Mennonite Brethren are "torn between a closer relationship with Evangelicals on the one hand and a desire to be part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite family on the other."⁴² It is not hard to see why the Mennonite Brethren debated their own religious self-understanding.

J.B. TOEWS: A MIDDLE PATH?

There are many other books which the Historical Commission published soon following the release of J.A. Toews's book. Several of these books will be mentioned after a look at a relatively late book, J.B. Toews's *A Pilgrimage of Faith*. J.B. Toews's book (not to be confused with J.A. Toews) is in several ways a complement to *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. It, unlike many of the other commissioned books, is a single

⁴⁰ Harry Loewen, "Ambivalence in Mennonite Brethren Self-Understanding: An 1860 Continuum?" *Direction* 23 (Fall 1994): 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

author work and like J.A. Toews's book chronicles events from 1860 to the present. While *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* is a more technical history, in that it plots the development of congregations and institutions, it does little to develop the history of theology which guided the Mennonite Brethren. *Pilgrimage of Faith* sets out to chart exactly this development of theology and thought among the Mennonite Brethren.

Even though *Pilgrimage of Faith* was published in 1993 the very first sentence of the preface makes it clear that Toews is writing this work specifically to address the issue of religious self-understanding; "this book seeks to provide a biblical and theological framework for the Mennonite Brethren search for identity...of the late twentieth century."⁴³ Though his objective to address the identity crisis is the same as J.A. Toews, the approach which J.B. Toews uses in his treatment of the relationship to evangelicalism is quite different from J.A. Toews's even though he may be as wary of evangelicalism as J.A. Toews. In *A Pilgrimage of Faith* Toews does not avoid exposing the Pietist or Baptist influences that the early Mennonite Brethren church encountered. Rather, Toews seeks to evaluate the various ways in which "foreign" theologies influenced the Mennonite Brethren and appreciate where they have been helpful and point out where they have been detrimental. At the same time Toews asserts that even in the earliest days of the Mennonite Brethren Church they wanted to maintain their Mennonite self-understanding even though they were also open to the theological ideas of the Baptists and Pietists.

A few examples from his book will suffice to demonstrate the balancing act that Toews attempts to maintain. Toews's statement that "though Pietism had strongly

⁴³J.B. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, iii.

influenced [Mennonite Brethren] spiritual renewal, they chose not to become identified with it, preferring instead to remain clearly committed to sixteenth century Anabaptism, primarily the Dutch stream as interpreted by Menno Simons"⁴⁴ ends with a footnote to Victor Adrian's article, *Born of Anabaptism and Pietism*. Toews is contesting Adrian's conclusion that the Mennonite Brethren were born of Anabaptism and Pietism by saying that the Mennonite Brethren were influenced by but not birthed by Pietism.

Toews claims that the situation in which the Mennonite Brethren found themselves led to a confusion of identity in the initial years. The Mennonite Brethren struggled to gain the right to exist among the larger Mennonite Body.⁴⁵ This struggle increased the Mennonite Brethren's openness to Pietistic and Baptist influence as these movements seemed to provide support and encouragement and did not reject them as the larger Mennonite church did. Finding acceptance in Pietist and Baptist sources helped the Mennonite Brethren to survive but it also led to increased confusion about religious self-understanding. In these few pages Toews's balancing act can be seen. Toews wants to stress that the early Mennonite Brethren desired to maintain their Mennonite identity while being thankful for the help that the Pietists and Baptists provided. The openness to these evangelical influences, however, created identity problems for the Mennonite Brethren. How were they to understand who they were? Were they evangelicals or Mennonites or something else? Toews did not want to resolve the question of theological self-understanding by abandoning Mennonite Brethren distinctives. Rather, by raising

⁴⁴ Ibid., 13-14, 331, n. 47

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

awareness of the problems that outside influences had created for the Mennonite Brethren he sought to inform them that not all evangelical influences had increased their religious piety and expressions of faith. Furthermore, Toews wants to demonstrate to his audience that the rich, Biblical and theological ideas held by the early Mennonite Brethren owed much more to Anabaptism than to early evangelical influences. He does not want the Mennonite Brethren to feel the need to look to evangelical sources for their theological heritage. He does not want the Mennonite Brethren to embrace evangelicalism without realizing that doing so can create detrimental as well as positive results.

Toews wants to stress that the Mennonite Brethren were not as heavily influenced by "outside" movements as some would suggest. An example of this can be observed in Toews's discussion of the first Mennonite confession of faith. He admits that the confession was based on a Baptist document but that this particular Mennonite Brethren confession never really meant that much to the Mennonite Brethren and should not be considered a meaningful confession of faith.⁴⁶ He reasons that since the first confession was a document that had to be given to the Russian government in order to maintain their rights as Mennonites and since the confession was hastily constructed and just as hastily submitted that it had very little significance for the early Mennonite Brethren. Toews argues that as far as confessions of faith go, the Mennonite Brethren were more Anabaptist than Baptist. Toews states that "the early Mennonite Brethren, rooted in the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite family and firmly committed to the teachings of Menno, also shared their forebear's aversion to doctrinal formulations."⁴⁷ The fact that it was not until 1902, more than 30 years after

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

their beginnings, that the Mennonite Brethren crafted a confession of faith which they held as significant and to which they ascribed proves that making doctrinal formulations was not that important to them. Since such formulations were significant to German Baptists, their influence over the Mennonite Brethren in at least this area did not overcome their Anabaptist style. Furthermore, the confession of 1902 was "more a descriptive statement of scriptural understanding than a definitive theological statement."⁴⁸ The first confession of faith was modeled on the Baptist style but the 1902 confession, the one that the Mennonite Brethren hold as more important, followed a distinctly Anabaptist style.

This method of argumentation can be found in many other examples. Toews claims that the practice of immersion in Baptism was not solely the influence of the Baptists but also harkens back to the custom of the early Anabaptists.⁴⁹ The same is true of the observance of the Bible study hour. This habit, though re-invigorated by Pietist influence, was not primarily rooted in their association with the Pietists but rather a rejuvenation of the practice of the early Anabaptists.⁵⁰ In a final example, Toews argues that while the influence of Pietism encouraged the Mennonite Brethren to enlarge the scope of their missionary zeal⁵¹ their foundation of mission theology was firmly rooted in Menno Simons's theology of the two worlds and the Schleithem Confession's notion of being in the world but not of it.⁵² The Mennonite Brethren strongly desired that all people be part of the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁵¹ Ibid., 83-84.

⁵² Ibid., 69-70.

kingdom of Christ and this zeal was part of their spiritual heritage as found in the theology of Menno and the early Anabaptists. Thus, the Mennonite Brethren zeal for missions, according to Toews, was certainly not a new import from Pietism but a renewal of sixteenth century Anabaptism.

Toews is also critical of the influences that he believed affected the modern church, and he often uses the historical positions of Mennonite Brethren theology and practice as a basis for this criticism. In one instance Toews discusses the uneasy relationship with government that the Mennonite Brethren have typically had throughout most of their history. He roots this unease in the theological understanding of the two worlds. He perceives the Mennonite Brethren Church today as very open to government support and involvement and interprets this as a letting go of the theology of the two worlds and an openness to an unbiblical comfort with this world. In addition to theological considerations, Toews points out that the birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church itself was a rebellion against the "Old Church" for joining Church and State together in the Russian colonies.³³ Though Toews does not mention the evangelical tendency to unite Christian faith with national pride in this section, one is left wondering if Toews's discussion of the historical uneasiness between Mennonite Brethren and government is not a word of caution to an unreflective acceptance of this current trend among some evangelicals.

As we have observed, Toews is interpreting the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church in a way that emphasizes the Anabaptist-Mennonite roots of its theological foundations. Towards the end of his book Toews is more explicit concerning how this

³³ Ibid., 78-80,

should affect the Mennonite Brethren's current relationship with the various aspects of evangelicalism. Using the work of Calvin Redekop as his source, Toews concludes that throughout their history the Mennonite Brethren have had an openness to others who shared their commitment to Scripture,⁵⁴ such as the Baptists, Pietists, Fundamentalists and Evangelicals. When the Mennonite Brethren came to North America they found themselves caught in a crossfire between the modernists and fundamentalists⁵⁵ on the issue of biblical inerrancy.⁵⁶ The Mennonite Brethren knew they were not modernists and thus allied themselves with the fundamentalists. Though Toews strongly believes that this should have been a very uneasy alliance, he reports that it was not so. As a result of this alliance the Mennonite Brethren became preoccupied with issues that were foreign to them, such as Biblical inerrancy,⁵⁷ a concept of free grace that leads to a 'health and wealth gospel',⁵⁸ and an emphasis on the Rapture, Millennium and End-times speculation.⁵⁹ Toews predicts that the adoption and incorporation of these foreign doctrines may cause the Mennonite Brethren to float aimlessly among the various streams of theology because they have replaced their Mennonite Brethren distinctives with these "foreign" preoccupations.

After chronicling a history of acceptance towards the theological influences of various evangelical streams in both Europe and North America Toews outlines the harmful effect of this openness. What then is Toews's solution to this situation? Toews writes that

⁵⁴ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 196-198.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 198.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 199-200.

unless the Mennonite Brethren formulate their own theological frame of reference and seek to maintain a Mennonite Brethren distinctive in the future, the Mennonite Brethren risk losing their identity.⁶⁰ A way of solving the dilemma can be read into his evaluation of the Mennonite Brethren Bible training centers.. Toews sees the Bible schools as an arena for the struggle for theological identity. He concludes that the Bible institutions, such as Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Fresno and Tabor, have failed to provide a distinctly Mennonite Brethren-Anabaptist training.⁶¹ Rather, these schools relied heavily on evangelical resources both in textbook material and in style of schooling.⁶² It seems Toews would have the Bible institutes teach their students about their past and include how the history of their past relationships with evangelicalism has both hindered and complemented the Mennonite Brethren. By doing so, the Mennonite Brethren might maintain their religious self-understanding.

Toews may be correct in his conclusion that the Mennonite Brethren Bible training institutes failed to educate the Mennonite Brethren youth concerning Anabaptist distinctives. His work, however, comes almost at the end of a series of books initiated by the Historical Commission. This series provided the Mennonite Brethren with volumes that would raise the historical awareness of the denomination. Following the publication of J.A. Toews's *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, the Historical Commission published a book edited by Paul Toews entitled *Pilgrims and Strangers* in which J.A Toews's book is discussed and various reactions expressed. In 1979, *P.M. Friesen and His History*, edited

⁶⁰ Ibid., 200.

⁶¹ Ibid., 187.

⁶² Ibid., 182.

by Abraham Friesen, was released. This book came one year after the publication of an anthology of many of the writings of P.M. Friesen which were translated into English for the first time. The volume was entitled *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*. The release of this translation was preceded by a special feature in the *Herald* on P.M. Friesen⁶³ and a study symposium which investigated the significance of P.M. Friesen.⁶⁴ In 1988 John B. Toews (not to be confused with J.B. Toews) published *Perilous Journey: The Mennonite Brethren in Russia 1860-1910*. Paul Toews was the editor of two more books, *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation* and *Bridging Troubled Waters: Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century* in 1993 and 1995 respectively. These are just some of the books published by the Historical Commission. Other books sponsored by the Mennonite Brethren Conference with a specifically historical aim include G.W. Peters's *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions*, 1984, Peter Penner's *No Longer At Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada*, 1987, and a 1973 translation of a previously unpublished manuscript by Jacob P. Bekker, one of the 18 founders of the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860. These books constituted a large increase in the amount of literature available about Mennonite Brethren history. It seems that it was no coincidence that as the Mennonite Brethren struggled to understand their identity that they would seek to understand their history.

⁶³ Abraham Friesen, "P.M. Friesen: The Man and the History," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 26 May 1978, 2-7.

⁶⁴ Harold Jantz, "Massive Translation Project Complete," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 14 April 1978, 14.

In chapter one it was shown that the Mennonite Brethren considered themselves to be evangelicals and that they readily sought out association with other evangelical groups. Their identity as evangelicals seemed to be settled, at least in the minds of the majority of Mennonite Brethren. Yet, in chapter two we observed that as scholars and historians wrote about the history of the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren and evangelicalism, the ferment of how to respond to evangelicalism in the present was mounting. Victor Adrian claimed that since the Mennonite Brethren are children of one evangelical stream, Pietism, it was logical that the Mennonite Brethren should seek out association with other evangelicals. Others, like J.A. Toews and J.B. Toews, believed that it was important to appreciate the evangelical influences of the past and present but to do that at the expense of their Anabaptist theology was unacceptable. In fact, they encouraged the denomination to evaluate evangelicalism and observe the negative influence it had had on Mennonite Brethren theology and self-understanding. And herein lies the rub. While virtually all Mennonite Brethren agreed that they were evangelical, there were widely divergent views on what role their Mennonite Brethren self-understanding should have. The scholars discussed here represent the various views within the denomination. We shall observe in the next chapter that some Mennonite Brethren agreed with J.A. Toews and J.B. Toews and wanted to maintain their Mennonite Brethren character. Others perceived themselves as children of evangelicalism and wanted less and less to do with their Mennonite theology. The result of this tension can be observed in the twenty year long debate over the issue of

the name change. It is in this debate that we can observe Mennonite Brethren fighting passionately about the role of the their Mennonite and evangelical character.

CHAPTER 4

IDENTITY: THE NAME CHANGE DEBATE

The more than twenty years in which the Mennonite Brethren debated whether or not to change their name provides yet another lens through which we may observe the relationship of the Mennonite Brethren to evangelicalism. The debate, or more accurately the lack of debate, surrounding the Mennonite Brethren decision to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada indicated that the Mennonite Brethren were very keen to identify themselves as evangelicals. During the 1970's and 1980's the Mennonite Brethren studied their history in an effort to understand both their evangelical and Anabaptist heritage. As we observed from the writings of several authors, the interpretation of the past was used as a guide to their relationships with evangelicals and Mennonites in the present. In this chapter we will observe how the Mennonite Brethren struggled with their Mennonite identity. John Redekop frequently reiterated that he wanted the Mennonite Brethren Conference to be both evangelical and Anabaptist but not Mennonite. The reaction to Redekop's suggested name change allows us to see that while some in the Conference agreed with him others wanted to get rid of all Mennonite and Anabaptist ideas in favor of evangelical models and still others began to criticize evangelicalism in an effort to prevent

their Mennonite theology from becoming overshadowed by evangelical theology. The Mennonite Brethren were united in their unwillingness to give up their evangelical identity but the role of their Mennonite theology was an issue of lengthy debate.

JOHN REDEKOP: FOR NAME CHANGE

Personal Opinion Column

In his evaluation of the identity crisis of the 1970's Peter Penner writes that "some held John Redekop responsible for a *zealous attempt* in his Personal Opinion articles to *barter our heritage* by his repeated return to [the name change debate] theme."¹ A perusal of Redekop's columns certainly does indicate that the issues of ethnicity and the name change were of importance to him. In his final column before a year long break of his Opinion columns Redekop expressed his thoughts about what he would have done differently if he could re-do his sixteen years of columns. If such were the case he claims that he would have dealt "more fully with denomination-ethnic issues."² For Redekop the ethnic problem was the most pressing issue why the Mennonite Brethren should change their name. Redekop's statement of regret must have caused mixed emotions among those who wanted him to leave the issues of the name change and ethnicity alone.³ As early as 1969 Redekop writes that he is convinced that the term Mennonite "refers to so many

¹ Peter Penner, *No Longer At Arms Length*, 154.

² John Redekop, "The Final Column," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 29 February 1980, 11.

³ Harry Loewen, "Stop Harping on the Name," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 18 May 1990, 12.

different types of people, some obviously disciples of Christ and others generally not, that in terms of a specific Christian designation it has lost much, if not all, of its utility. Therefore another name should be used when the Christian-Anabaptist quality is to be stressed. I cannot see how one label can be used correctly to refer both to a heterogeneous, internally inconsistent ethnic minority and a church of disciplined believers."⁴ This statement forms about as succinct a summary of Redekop's ideas of the 1970's and 1980's as can be found. From this point on many of his columns and finally his book develop and expand on these ideas.

One of Redekop's columns in 1970 explains why he seeks a name change. He writes, " as readers of this column know, I have on several occasions questioned the propriety of our name . . . My reason for raising these points is not that I wish to abandon what I think are laudable Apostolic-Anabaptist distinctives but because I wish to preserve them."⁵ Indeed his columns show that Redekop was an ardent supporter of the traditional Mennonite peace position.⁶ The way that Redekop perceived the situation was thus: the term Mennonite has a dual meaning, designating both an ethnic group and a religious group. Because non-Mennonite people perceive Mennonites as an ethnic group they are no more likely to want to go to a Mennonite church than a non-Ukrainian would be to go to a Ukrainian church. This results in a hampered ability to evangelize and as evangelism is one of the primary goals of the Mennonite Brethren Church any non-essential that hinders

⁴ John Redekop, "A Reply," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 21 March 1969, 10.

⁵ John Redekop, "Small Likelihood: Great Challenge etc." *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 24 July 1970, 22.

⁶ John Redekop, "Penner Vs Beaver County Draft Board," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 21 August 1970, 8.

evangelism should be removed. At the same time, a name should be chosen to replace the old Mennonite Brethren label which would symbolize the Conference's commitment to Anabaptist and evangelical theology.

As early as 1971 Redekop suggested that the name Evangelical-Anabaptist replace Mennonite Brethren in order to accomplish all the goals which Redekop lists and to maneuver around the pitfalls he believed the Mennonite Brethren Church to have been in at that time. The title of one Opinion column makes it fairly clear what direction he was trying to move the Mennonite Brethren denomination; "Evangelical-Anabaptists But Not Mennonite."⁷ This article takes the form of a dialogue between two people, person A and person B. Here person A asks all kinds of questions of person B, the voice of Redekop, about the reasons for changing the name. Person B proves to his questioner that there is not "one good reason why we should keep on calling ourselves Mennonite Brethren."⁸ Person B demonstrates that a name change could make a difference in attracting people to the church when Person A recoils in horror at Person B's suggestion that Person A call himself a Fascist or Communist. According to Person B the problem is that most people associate the word Mennonite with "quaint culture, buggies, farming, pacifism . . . but rarely do they associate it with straight forward Christianity."⁹ In order to avoid invoking a confusing mix of images Person B's solution is to drop the term Mennonite from the denominational title. Person B goes on to say that Menno Simons would not want the

⁷ John Redekop, "Evangelical-Anabaptist But Not Mennonite," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 9 July 1971, 8.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

denomination named after him and more importantly the Bible tells us not to form little groups named after a human preacher. Later in the column Person B states that it is because he wants to keep a true evangelical-Anabaptist view that he wants to see the name change. Ties to Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service and other inter-Mennonite groups should be maintained. Towards the end of the article Person B states that "changing the name will make it much easier to win people for Christ and "might make effective witnessing far more likely."¹⁰ At the end of the article it is Person B who asks the last question when he inquires whether Person A knows of anyone who was drawn to the denomination by the word Mennonite. Person A replies that he has never heard of such a thing.

A column appearing shortly after the one just discussed makes it clear that Redekop perceived the denomination as already being fully evangelical-Anabaptist. This designation was not a reflection of what he hoped the denomination would become but what he believed it to be at present. This sentiment is clear in his statement that "the word Mennonite has perhaps lost its utility for evangelical-Anabaptists."¹¹ Though there is little indication that members of the Mennonite Brethren constituency wrote the *Herald* to inquire exactly what Redekop meant by the term evangelical-Anabaptist, a critical look at Redekop's work must try to make that kind of evaluation.

An article printed earlier in the *Herald* sheds some light on the definition of evangelical-Anabaptist. In 1970 an essay by Myron Augsburg was published in which he

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John Redekop, "A Response," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, September 24, 1971, 8.

declared that the Mennonites have been evangelicals for 450 years.¹² In fact, Augsburgers believes that the Mennonite brotherhood were the original evangelicals of the Reformation. Though Augsburgers' argument is intriguing the importance of his article lies in the fact that it demonstrates that the Mennonite Brethren believed themselves to be genuine evangelicals since their very beginning. This is an opinion which Redekop shares. In a 1976 column Redekop recalls a situation in which a Mennonite Brethren pastor said that it was time to pay more attention to evangelicalism and less attention to Anabaptism. Redekop balks at such a statement because its very premise assumes that Anabaptism is not evangelical. Redekop believed that the pastor was duped theologically as "an Anabaptist is an evangelical person and we dare not forget it. Nor should we let anyone else forget it."¹³

It is important to note, however, that by using the word evangelical, Redekop is not necessarily endorsing the ideas of twentieth century American evangelicals, but rather to him an evangelical-Anabaptist is someone who embraces the wholeness of Anabaptist doctrine. Indeed, in this article he gives a somewhat veiled criticism of modern American evangelicalism when he says "our pressing need at this time is not to abandon the wholeness of Anabaptist doctrine for an evangelicalism which often overlooks Jesus' call to faithful discipleship, but to insist that the Biblical components of Anabaptism be preached and practiced in their fullness."¹⁴ Evangelicalism in its truest form seems to be, for Redekop at least, the theology of Conrad Grebel, Menno Simons and other early Anabaptists.

¹² Myron Augsburgers, "Renewal of Social Concern," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 3 April 1970, 2.

¹³ John Redekop, "Evangelical Salt," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 12 April 1976, 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

It is not surprising, therefore, that while wanting to rename his denomination evangelical-Anabaptist, he directs some of his harshest words towards contemporary evangelical groups especially of American varieties. In one column he is especially critical of the Far Right movement in the United States and expresses considerable consternation at the acceptance and support it receives from the Mennonite Brethren. He claims that the policies and practices of the Far Right movement are a good reason not to consider the term fundamentalist in the new name for the Mennonite Brethren Conference. In his opinion evangelical-Anabaptist or even just Anabaptist or evangelical alone would be far better than fundamentalist.¹⁵

His criticism of American evangelicalism, fundamentalism and especially their growing involvement with the Republican Party continues in other articles¹⁶ yet he defends the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada just as adamantly. In one column Redekop states that he has received several letters questioning whether Anabaptists should be part of the EFC because most evangelicals de-emphasize or ignore the peace position and also that cooperating with other evangelicals compromises Anabaptist theological distinctives. In reply to these letters Redekop outlines what he considers the essentials of faith, a list of six items which reads very much like Bebbington's evangelical quadrilateral, and states that in these points the Mennonite Brethren and the EFC agree. Redekop acknowledges that

¹⁵ John Redekop, "Danger on the Right," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 23 October 1981, 12.

¹⁶ John Redekop, "Danger on the Left," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 26 February 1982, 10.

John Redekop, "God and the Republicans," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 21 September 1984, 12.

almost all of the other members of the EFC do not accept the Anabaptist peace position but also states that the Mennonite Brethren lack insight in areas such as the work of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to cross cultural barriers, aspects of Christian faith in which other evangelicals excel. Realizing that they can learn from other evangelical groups should compel the Mennonite Brethren to work together with other evangelicals in order to help each other to expand their own vision of God's truth. What is important is that all the members of the EFC are committed to the *goal* of practicing the whole counsel of God even as they try to reach an understanding of the fullness of that goal. Furthermore, participation in the EFC allows the Mennonite Brethren to share their peace position and theological distinctness with others. The EFC provides the Mennonite Brethren with a forum to voice their concerns that is open to listening and learning from the Mennonite Brethren.¹⁷ It is interesting to note that in "Interaction With Evangelicals" Redekop does not put Mennonite peace theology in his list of essentials of faith. It certainly appears that he is willing to de-emphasize the peace position in order to argue for maintaining ties with the EFC. To be fair, Redekop did serve as the president of the EFC from 1991 until 1993 and there practiced what he preached and promoted the Mennonite Brethren peace position among the various evangelical groups of Canada. None-the-less, Redekop is quite firm that the Mennonite peace position should not prevent interaction with other evangelicals.

Redekop's understanding of what it means to be an evangelical-Anabaptist is a complex concept. He certainly does not want to invoke the ideas of the American

¹⁷ John Redekop, "Interaction With Evangelicals," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 19 April 1985, 23.

fundamentalists in the proposed name change. Furthermore he is critical of American evangelicals who blur faith and politics and acknowledges that the Mennonite Brethren have theological distinctives which virtually no other Canadian evangelical movement shares. Redekop wants to avoid these negative connotations by nuancing the term evangelical with the ideals of the Anabaptists. And even here the term Anabaptist is not to include all streams of Reformation Anabaptism. He wants to exclude the stain of such extremists as David Joris and the Munsterites from the term Anabaptist. It is his hope that the two terms, evangelical and Anabaptist, will modify each other. Evangelical modifies the term Anabaptist to mean a specific strain of Reformation Anabaptism. The term Anabaptist specifies what kind of evangelicals are being referred to.

It seems that by suggesting and endorsing this new name, evangelical-Anabaptist, Redekop is in a sense trying to forge a new term. He believes that the two terms when "taken together . . . modify each other and in combination they take on a distinctive meaning which neither has by itself. The designation emphasizes and integrates the two streams of our past and fundamental guidelines for our future."¹⁸ It seems that Redekop is promoting an idea similar to that of Victor Adrian's article, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism" in that he sees the Mennonite Brethren Church as a combination of both theological streams. Yet, Redekop is forging a new meaning for the terms evangelical and Anabaptist. It would seem that if the Mennonite Brethren Conference were to accept that name it would be a symbolic acceptance of a new identity. But what kind of identity is Redekop endorsing?

¹⁸ John Redekop, *A People Apart*, 162.

His comments on the dissolution of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference which changed its name to Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches in 1987 shows that Redekop does not want evangelicalism to dominate over Anabaptism in the Mennonite Brethren denomination. In fact he declares that the change of name for the EMB's was a loss. The loss was the "rejection of a thoroughly Biblical anabaptist-evangelical theology."¹⁹ According to Redekop the change of name was tragic because he saw the present day as a time in which "diluted pseudo-evangelicalism" was disseminating "more hype and commercialism than substance" and thus the voice of an evangelical-Anabaptist witness was much needed. Redekop urges the Mennonite Brethren to avoid such a path. He wants a name change to signify a renewal of Anabaptist theology not a rejection of it as he perceives the EMB to have done with their name change. Redekop's very strong endorsement of Anabaptism and his strong but sometimes wary support of evangelicalism makes for a complex proposal to unravel. Redekop wants to create an evangelical-Anabaptist self-understanding but one gets the impression that his definition of evangelical is unique to him and a few like-minded Mennonites such as Myron Augsburger. His concept of Mennonite Brethren identity seems much more Anabaptist than evangelical. And yet Redekop's involvement with thoroughly evangelical organizations like the EFC indicates that he wanted to embrace the evangelicals of Canada as well. Even in John Redekop the tension resulting from a desire for a dual identity can be discerned. That he would promote the name evangelical-Anabaptist for the conference is not surprising.

¹⁹ John Redekop, "Requiem for the EMB," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 18 September 1987, 10.

A People Apart

A People Apart does not add much to the discussion that cannot be gleaned from Redekop's many opinion columns. The bulk of the book argues with those inside the Mennonite Brethren conference who believe Mennonite to be a purely religious term and who refuse to acknowledge its ethnic connotations. Once Redekop has established the point that there are two meanings of the term Mennonite present in this one word, one ethnic and one religious, he goes on to state that a name change is necessary so that evangelism will not be hindered by the ethnic connotation of the word Mennonite. Redekop believes that the ethnic understanding of Mennonite will forever be the dominant conception by those outside the Mennonite fold. He wants the Mennonite Brethren Conference to become known for its thoroughly Christian qualities, not its celebration of a particular ethnicity. He is striving to create a Christian-centered idea not an ethnic identity, thus the term Mennonite must go.

Redekop wants a name that will reflect the true identity of the Mennonite Brethren. The next several paragraphs indicate, however, that this new label is fraught with problems. Even though most Mennonite Brethren identified themselves as evangelicals, there were some who objected to the use of the term evangelical in the new name proposed by Redekop. Abe Dueck points out that the term evangelical is used to denote six or more movements in Christian history and that the term is often used in a way that confuses the various meanings of the word. Furthermore the word evangelical evokes such negative

ideas as anti-intellectualism.²⁰ For these reasons Dueck is hesitant to include the term evangelical in Redekop's proposed name change.

Redekop addressed the criticism of Abe Dueck regarding the choice of the word evangelical as a denominational name in *A People Apart*. Redekop believes that Dueck's explanation of the shortcomings of the term evangelical are unconvincing. Redekop states that "the general thrust of [the term] evangelical is clear, and second, none of the other evangelical connotations [which Dueck points out] are so strong that they undermine the validity of the meaning we wish to emphasize."²¹ Although this might be true in some areas and perhaps more so in Canada than in the United States, at least one leading evangelical has raised serious concerns about the meaning of the term evangelical. In an interview with *The Christian Century* Tony Campollo states that "many people who previously called themselves fundamentalists, in distinction from evangelicals, are now calling themselves evangelicals. Since the word evangelical is now so closely associated with views such as those represented [by the] Religious Right many of us who have considered ourselves to be evangelicals are asking ourselves if we can use the term to denote who we are."²² The policies and practices of the Religious Right are highly criticized by Redekop and yet it seems that for some this movement is what the term evangelical has come to be identified with. It is far more likely that the term evangelical-Anabaptist would conjure up images of twentieth-century Americans than sixteenth-century reformers.

²⁰ Abe Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Definitions and Temptations," *Mennonite Brethren Bible College Bulletin* Spring 1985, 3-5.

²¹ John Redekop, *A People Apart*, 161-62.

²² "An Interview With Tony Compollo," *Christian Century* 22 February 1995, 213.

In addition to claiming that the term evangelical is clear Redekop asserts that the term Anabaptist is clear. The term has no ethnic meaning, no cultural exclusiveness and is clearly explained in generally similar ways in both dictionaries and textbooks. The imprecision of the term Anabaptist is "certainly less than the imprecision of Mennonite and it can without much difficulty be shaped and used to convey the meaning we want to emphasize."²³ Several items, however, indicate that the term Anabaptist was not as well understood or desirable as he believed it to be. The first item is a response to Redekop's book written by the editor of the French-language counterpart to the *Herald*, *Le Lien*. Though the author approves of a name change he writes that the name evangelical-Anabaptist is risky despite its theological accuracy. C. Leblanc wonders how one would "explain to the ordinary Quebecois the difference between a Baptist and an Anabaptist? It seems to me that we would face other problems if we changed the name [to Anabaptist]."²⁴ A second piece of evidence indicating that the Mennonite Brethren themselves did not find the term Anabaptist to be clear consists of a set of articles Redekop himself wrote. Two years after the publication of *A People Apart*, Redekop began the first of two articles by saying that "in the recent months several people have urged me to state what I mean when I endorse Anabaptism."²⁵ He dedicates two lengthy articles to explaining the history, theology and basic beliefs of Anabaptism. Furthermore, several letters to the

²³ John Redekop, *A People Apart*, 162.

²⁴ Claudette Leblanc, "A View From Quebec," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 15 May 1987, 7.

²⁵ John Redekop, "Who Are the Anabaptists?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 17 March 1989, 17.

_____, "Anabaptist Beliefs: The Twelve Key Principles," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 31 March 1989, 12-13.

editor indicate that people who claimed to know what the term Anabaptist meant did not want the term used in the church name. In one letter a Mennonite Brethren constituent states that there are plenty of people within the Mennonite Brethren church who are much in favor of a name change but who would vehemently oppose any name which would tie them to Anabaptist roots.²⁶ A second letter supports just that statement. One Mennonite Brethren member believed that it would be quite acceptable to drop the term Mennonite but the term Anabaptist is worse as it was utterly confusing and useless.²⁷

The Denomination's Response to Redekop's Arguments

The debate concerning the name change seems to have struck a tender nerve within the Conference which the joining of the EFC did not. This issue touched on the very balance that the Mennonite Brethren had constructed concerning their Mennonite and evangelical self-understanding. There are many letters to the editor printed in the *Herald* on this issue. In particular, the responses to Redekop's ideas are varied and this is true even among those who agreed with Redekop. In 1971 a Mennonite Brethren pastor wrote that the name Mennonite was "shopworn," "outdated," and "useless" and furthermore "unbiblical."²⁸ This pastor reported that in his twenty years of involvement with missions and evangelism he has found that the use of the name Mennonite was a serious stumbling

²⁶ George H. Epp, "The Name Change Debate Continues," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 17 April 1987, 11.

²⁷ Dorothy Nielson, "An Adopted MB Speaks," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 28 August 1987, 9.

²⁸ J.M. Schmidt, "Why Be Unbiblical?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 10 September 1971, 10.

block for non-Mennonites and even Mennonite youth. This stumbling block prevented these people from joining the church.²⁹ The perceived detriment to church growth and evangelism is by far the most frequently cited reason why people want a name change which excludes a reference to the term Mennonite. Out of eighteen letters that specifically support a name change, more than ten claim that the Mennonite name prevents church growth, outreach and evangelism. These people agree that the problem, as Redekop describes it, is that Mennonite is an ethnic term. One Mennonite Brethren writes that "people who are not concerned about reaching their neighbors have no problem with our name."³⁰ Another member, John Enns believes that the name "has a stigma attached to it" as well as "a foreign connotation."³¹ An associate pastor of a Mennonite Brethren church who was himself a non-ethnic Mennonite writes that the reason that people keep a distance from Mennonite Brethren churches is the perception that only those of Mennonite cultural background can be accepted into the church. The pastor claims that a name change would increase church growth by showing non-Mennonites that the church accepted them.³² Three more non-ethnic Mennonite members wrote letters which make similar statements to Keith Poysti's³³ as well as numerous examples of ethnic Mennonites who like J.M. Schmidt and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ John H. Enns, "Church Growth," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 9 January 1987, 11.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Keith Poysti, "Name Change One Small Indicator," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 17 April 1987, 11.

³³ Phil Shea, "The Name Change Issue," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 12 June 1987, 11.
Mark Johnson, "Yes To Name Change," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 17 July 1987, 12.

Allan Camponi, "Putting Ethnicity in Perspective," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 28 August 1987, 8.

John Enns agree that the term Mennonite needs to be removed to bring people into the Mennonite churches.

What must have been disheartening for Redekop when reading the responses of those who wanted the change of name was the almost complete lack of recognition of one of his main themes. In his columns and in his book he repeatedly and emphatically states that a name change should signal a renewal, a return even, of Anabaptist distinctives. Yet of all the responses to his book and columns, very few who want to change the name pick up on and agree with Redekop's concern for Anabaptist renewal. Only the rare letter in favor of name change addresses this issue in agreement with Redekop. One member writes that Redekop's proposal to change the name is a good idea and that any new name that is found must "[preserve] our church's concern with peace and peacemaking which lies at the core of our identity."³⁴ The more frequent attitude towards a name that would reflect Anabaptist theology is that of one member who wrote in to say that it was quite good that the term Mennonite be taken out but to replace it with the term Anabaptist was equally undesirable. This member believes that the term Anabaptist is "outdated and would require endless explaining."³⁵ One gets the impression that many of the Mennonite Brethren who advocated a change of name were not really in agreement with Redekop's ideas. Redekop certainly shared their desire to decrease the ethnic barrier in outreach efforts but he also wished to bring people into a church that was actively living out the theology of peace as

³⁴ Phil Garber, "A New Name Suggested," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 13 November 1987, 10.

³⁵ Anonymous, "On Why People Leave the MB Church," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 27 November 1987, 13.

understood by the early Anabaptists. The constituents who wanted a name change seemed decidedly less enthusiastic about Redekop's latter desire.

HAROLD JANTZ: AGAINST NAME CHANGE

The push to emphasize Anabaptist distinctives in the Mennonite Brethren church came more often from those who most adamantly opposed the idea of a name change. Two features that were always included in every issue of the *Herald* were Redekop's Personal Opinion column and the editorial which during the 1970's and 1980's was usually written by Harold Jantz. On the issue of the name change these two men were consistently advocating opposite positions. Jantz did not support a name change. The ideas expressed by Jantz and the responses to it help to illustrate the position of those who did not want to change the name, the other side of the argument.

Editorials

Jantz, as discussed in a previous chapter, was in favor of the Mennonite Brethren decision to join the EFC but was also strongly opposed to the name change as proposed by Redekop. In *A People Apart* Redekop criticizes Jantz for describing the Mennonite Brethren as a religious group and not as an ethnic group. Redekop believes that Jantz wants the term Mennonite to stand exclusively as a religious designation, something which Redekop claims is now impossible since Mennonite is widely perceived as ethnic.³⁶ Though

³⁶ John Redekop, *A People Apart*, 119-120.

Redekop is correct in his interpretation of Jantz, a reading of Jantz's editorials indicates that Jantz was not blind to the problem of ethnicity.³⁷ In one editorial Jantz calls attention to these very ideas. He states that if people want the term Mennonite Brethren to stand for an ethnic group then the members should stop calling themselves a church but if people want the term Mennonite Brethren to represent a "faith fellowship" then people need to stop distinguishing between people with names like "Smith, Cullen or Hill" from those with names like "Dyck, Friesen or Penner."³⁸ Jantz wants to redefine the term Mennonite Brethren as a strictly religious designation which "appreciates the great Anabaptist heritage which is our spiritual legacy and at the same time drops all those barriers which now hold some of the Smiths and the Yachuks at arm's length."³⁹

Though Jantz may agree that the problem of ethnic pride does hinder outreach and evangelism, unlike Redekop, he does not believe that a name change would solve the problem. In one editorial Jantz writes that "what turns people away is not the name but the actions and attitudes on display."⁴⁰ John Redekop would be the first to agree that a name change without a change in attitude and actions toward those outside the Mennonite

³⁷ See also George Shillington, "Mennonite Identity: Primary and Secondary Concerns," in *Why I Am A Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity*, ed. Harry Loewen (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1988), 282-291. Shillington discusses the difficulty of being accepted as a Mennonite Brethren when one does not share the same cultural background as most Canadian Mennonites. Shillington believes that the primary identity of Mennonites is their religious character and secondarily their cultural heritage. He is concerned that some Mennonite Brethren are getting their primary and secondary identities mixed up. This work echoes many of the same concerns that Jantz raised in "Church or Nation?"

³⁸ Harold Jantz, "Church or Nation?" *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 7 August 1970, 11.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Harold Jantz, "The Name Is Not the Barrier," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 23 July 1971, 9.

Brethren fold is useless and will not accomplish what Redekop wants.⁴¹ Unlike Redekop, however, Jantz writes that a change of name is really an attempt by some Mennonite Brethren to shed their history and past. More specifically it is an attempt to slough off their Anabaptist past. In this same article Jantz writes about the tensions of evangelicalism and Anabaptism present within the Mennonite Brethren church. While expressing appreciation for the impetus of renewal which evangelicalism has provided for the Mennonite Brethren church, Jantz also criticizes those whose faith does not compel them to become involved in the solution to the social problems of their neighbors. What Jantz seems to be most concerned about is the willingness to accept new insight and inspiration from other Christian communities at the expense of Mennonite Brethren distinctives, for example, the trading of the Anabaptist conviction that one must personally try to alleviate the poverty of fellow humans for the tendency of evangelicals to ignore these situations. The strength of the Mennonite Brethren church, writes Jantz, is not primarily from these outside sources but from the "stands of truth which have always existed within the Mennonite brotherhood. And that is how it should continue to be."⁴² Jantz then lists what Anabaptism has always been strongest in, discipleship, "conflict with powers of this age", the "way of love instead of force", "evangelical passion", Biblical literalism and the "fellowship of believers" and then urges people not to shuck off these ideas by changing the name.⁴³ Jantz defines the term Mennonite Brethren as a religious label and claims that to get rid of the name is to symbolically get rid of the theological concerns and religious past of the Mennonite

⁴¹ John Redekop, *A People Apart*, 153.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Brethren church. Jantz also indicates that the theology that is most likely to replace Anabaptism is that of North American evangelicalism.

Bearing in mind that Jantz was so strongly in favor of joining the EFC and that he so strongly wants to support the Anabaptist theology of the Mennonite Brethren church it is useful to investigate the development of Jantz's thought in the matter of the relationship of the Mennonite Brethren and the evangelical organizations of the NAE and the EFC. It is perhaps not coincidental that as the name change debate drags on for two decades Jantz's evaluation of evangelicalism becomes harsher. In his criticisms one can detect something of the tension that arises when a denomination seeks to embrace both an evangelical and an Anabaptist self-understanding.

Jantz was a strong advocate of the decision to join the EFC but at the same time cautioned the members of his denomination about issues which would increasingly dominate or characterize evangelical circles. Already in the 1960's Jantz is implicitly critical of evangelicalism. It is fairly clear that Jantz is speaking about evangelicals in one editorial in which he voices his disapproval of Christians who loudly and publicly promote the legislation of moral behavior without demonstrating personal piety and righteousness. Jantz then goes on to encourage people to look to the nineteenth-century evangelicals of England for models of people who were involved with social ills and issues but who did so with a great degree of personal piety and integrity. He lists such examples as William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury the factory reformer, and organizations such as the YMCA and Salvation Army.⁴⁴ Though Jantz makes some reproofing remarks to evangelicals of his present day,

⁴⁴ Harold Jantz, "Evangelicals Facing Social Ills," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 2

he's calling on all Christians to emulate the style of these men and women of the previous century. In the following issue Jantz speaks out against the American government's involvement in Vietnam but does not link this criticism to evangelicalism at this time.⁴⁵ This connection will come later.

In the first half of the 1970's Jantz promotes the decision to join the EFC. In 1975 he penned four paragraphs in his editorial stating his disagreement with the NAE.⁴⁶ The specific occasion which sparked Jantz's comments was the NAE's protest of Soviet harassment of Christians. To be sure Jantz was not in favor of harassing Christians in Russia but he objected to the selective nature of the NAE's protest. Jantz believed that if the NAE had protested the harassment of conscientious objectors or if they had appealed to the government to stop the indiscriminate bombing of Vietnam, the NAE might have greater credibility in the matter of the Soviet Christians. As it stood, in Jantz's opinion, the silence of American evangelicals while other Christians suffer is inexcusable. Their protest on behalf of the Soviet Christians looks like they are simply parroting the government's anti-Soviet rhetoric.

An article nearly a decade later makes it quite clear that he is very concerned about the evangelical tendency to blur faith and government as well as the growing political involvement of the NAE. The incident which Jantz's 1983 article refers to is the address which President Reagan gave at the NAE convention. At this meeting Reagan appealed to

February 1968, 3.

⁴⁵ Harold Jantz, "The Failure of Force," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 9 February 1968, 3.

⁴⁶ Harold Jantz, "NAE and Soviet Christians," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 18 April 1975.

the evangelicals to get behind his efforts to increase U.S. nuclear strength. Jantz expresses profound dismay that not only did Reagan gain the support of the majority of the evangelicals at the convention but that the evangelicals "have become the ones to provide moral justification for the renewed emphasis on military strength as the way to maintain the American way of life."⁴⁷ Jantz is outraged by the hypocrisy of evangelicals who describe the Soviet Union as the focus of evil while ignoring the growing churches in Russia, China and Romania and who at the same time are unconcerned about the growing numbers leaving the Church in the United States but rather encourage the capitalistic and militaristic policies of the government. Jantz's criticism is directed not only at the U.S. but also at a Canadian group called the Heritage Forum which had taken "virtually the same stance as U.S. evangelicals by urging the Canadian government to permit testing of the Cruise Missile and denouncing any who oppose it as *leftist*."⁴⁸ Jantz is concerned that three former presidents of the EFC were among the ranks of the Heritage Forum. Jantz was also so dismayed that a "new spirit of militarism" had made such great inroads into the evangelical ranks and threatened to "sap evangelicals of their ability to proclaim truly the message of a universal Christ and a universal church"⁴⁹ that he ends the article with an appeal to the Mennonite Brethren to re-think their relationship with both the NAE and the EFC. Jantz states that Mennonite Brethren must renounce any claim to the weapons of this world and as a result Jantz wonders whether the Mennonite Brethren should be part of any organization that

⁴⁷ Harold Jantz, "Will Evangelicals Justify This Militarism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 25 March 1983, 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

supports the use of force. Jantz has come a long way since his articles of the early 1970's in which he extolled the benefits of becoming part of the EFC. Jantz can no longer hold together the evangelical and Anabaptist identity. The theology of peace is central to Jantz's Anabaptist theology and his peace position takes precedence over his desire to maintain ties to organizations that blatantly disregard what he considers central to his faith.

Jantz's growing disenchantment with evangelicalism or at least with institutions such as NAE and EFC which claim to represent many evangelical groups, may help to explain why Jantz was so insistent that the Mennonite Brethren church retain its name and may also be related to his opinion that the term Mennonite Brethren refer exclusively to a religious tradition and not an ethnic group. It is important to note that both Jantz and Redekop shared a desire to see the Mennonite Brethren church renew its Anabaptist theology and practice and both criticized the evangelical tendency to reject Anabaptist peace principles. Yet Redekop sought to maintain a name that indicated a dual self-understanding in both Anabaptism and evangelicalism, even though he defined evangelical in an unusual way, and actively participated in the EFC while Jantz slowly came to the point where he suggested withdrawal from the EFC and a primary identification with Mennonite Brethren Anabaptism over against evangelicalism.

In 1985 Jantz published a key article on the identity of the Mennonite Brethren church.⁵⁰ Here he expresses concern that many Mennonite Brethren consider themselves to be evangelicals or even fundamentalists but denounce their Mennonite and Anabaptist

⁵⁰Harold Jantz, "On Being Who We Are," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 11 January 1985, 11.

theology. Jantz outlines the implications to the Mennonite Brethren church if the conference should decide to drop the name Mennonite Brethren. Jantz believes that the name is a symbol of its identity and to reject the name is to reject the identity. Dropping the name is a way of easing away from the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith with the result that the Mennonite Brethren theology would be abandoned. Furthermore the push by some to abandon a witness which sincerely seeks to be both evangelical and Anabaptist would bring disunity to the church.

The article discussed above is important because it delineates how closely linked the name change is to the tension of their evangelical and Mennonite self-understanding. Jantz writes that this article "has to do with how we identify ourselves"⁵¹ and states that the name change is a rejection of not only Mennonite identity but also a rejection of fellowship with other Mennonites. Yet the article shows that at the same time that Jantz disparages Mennonite Brethren pastors who reject Mennonite identity in favor of evangelical ones, he also seeks to maintain his evangelical identity. Two years after Jantz has seriously called into question the wisdom of maintaining ties with the EFC Jantz is still expressing his desire to be both "evangelical and Anabaptist."⁵² His sharp criticism of the NAE and EFC of 1983 indicates, however, that Jantz has a distinct uneasiness of becoming solely evangelical and fears a name change would create this undesirable situation.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

The Denomination's Response to Jantz's Arguments

The response to Jantz's call to leave the EFC was mixed. Harry Loewen, a member of the Mennonite Brethren denomination, called Jantz's article "timely and prophetic."⁵³ He describes the Mennonite Brethren relationship with the EFC as an "unholy alliance" and announces that it is his hope that the Conference will withdraw from the EFC. Loewen believes that "the MB's stand within the historic peace tradition which makes them unequal yoke-fellows with groups which clearly reject the love and peace ethic of the gospel."⁵⁴ Loewen is articulating the clash of theology between the Mennonite and evangelical traditions. For Loewen the two traditions are too disparate to warrant working together in the EFC. But Loewen's response was not the most typical among the Mennonite Brethren. The more common response was voiced by a pastor who expresses the desire "to continue to fellowship with [his] brothers and sisters in other evangelical churches."⁵⁵ It appears that Roland Marsch is unwilling to give up either his belief that the Mennonite Brethren position on non-violence or his involvement with evangelicals. At the end of his letter Marsch announces that he has just become the chairman of the Pastors Evangelical Fellowship of Winnipeg. Marsch was determined to hang on to both the Mennonite Brethren peace position and association with other evangelicals. Even though he acknowledges that most evangelicals disagree with the peace position this is not enough to make him reconsider whether he wants to continue to call himself an evangelical. Like Marsch the Conference

⁵³ Harry Loewen, "MBs and Evangelicals," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 23 April 1983, 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Roland Marsch, "Continue the Fellowship," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 20 May 1983, 11.

remained firmly committed to the EFC and did not withdraw from the EFC as Loewen and Jantz recommended.

COMPARING REDEKOP AND JANTZ

On two major points Jantz and Redekop disagree. The first point is whether the term Mennonite can come to mean purely a religious movement or whether it is hopelessly condemned to be both an ethnic and a religious term. The second point concerns whether the solution to the so-called identity crisis can be resolved or at least mitigated through a change of name. On several other points, however, they agree. Both desire a renewal of commitment to Anabaptist theology, both want to maintain an evangelical self-understanding on some level and both chastise evangelical organizations and Mennonite Brethren congregations that fail to take seriously the issues of Anabaptist theology. Yet regardless of how Jantz and Redekop agree or disagree on various points they both serve as prominent examples of how difficult it is for the Mennonite Brethren to maintain both an evangelical and an Anabaptist self-understanding. One gets the impression of the degree of strain that these two men experience as they try to hold the two in tension. The prominence of the Anabaptist identification over the evangelical identification is evident in both men. They both evaluate evangelicalism on the grounds of Anabaptism and rarely visa-versa. But as their writings indicate, the desire to hold and integrate a primary Anabaptist self-understanding with a secondary evangelical self-understanding is quite a juggling act. If it is difficult for these two scholarly men immersed in the history and work of the Mennonite

Brethren conference, how much more difficult it must be for most of the adherents of Mennonite Brethren congregations. It is not surprising that some would want to just get rid of Anabaptist theology and embrace only one model of a church rather than the inevitable tension and conflict of two traditions. This is the most common response of those who supported a name change.

VOICES FROM THE DENOMINATION

The response of those who wanted to maintain an emphasis on Anabaptism as well as evangelicalism within the Conference, many of which also opposed a name change, demonstrates the tension in which they held the two traditions. An article by Frank C. Peters, the moderator of the Canadian Conference at the time the article was written, reveals this tension.⁵⁶ This article appears a few months after the *Herald* reports of Peters's address at the annual convention. At this convention Peters declared that the Mennonite name was the biggest issue the Mennonite Brethren had faced in fifty years. In one discussion on the topic of evangelism, identity and name change, Peters warned against "merging with American models of evangelicalism or uncritically accepting twentieth century interpretations of Anabaptism. Our teachers must help us find a Mennonite Brethren definition of Anabaptism."⁵⁷ Peters is trying to stake out a theological

⁵⁶ Frank C. Peters, "For Such A Time As This," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 14 October 1977, 2-3, 28.

⁵⁷ Harold Jantz and Allan Siebert, "Mennonite Name - Biggest Issue in Fifty Years," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 22 July 1977, 3.

self-understanding that is uniquely Mennonite Brethren but which lies somewhere between the pillars of evangelicalism and Anabaptism. His article in October of 1977 is an attempt to explain this identity.

Peters writes that the Mennonite Brethren are an evangelical fellowship⁵⁸ but also that he fears the loss of the Mennonite name will end their identification with a stream of thought that looks back to the first century New Testament Church and its clarification in the Reformation, particularly the Anabaptists.⁵⁹ Peters believes that the Mennonite Brethren have tremendous commonalities with both evangelicals and other Mennonite denominations and should seek to work with both groups. Having outlined both his desire to embrace both evangelical and Anabaptist theologies Peters goes on to say that the issue that burdens him most is a loss of a sense of direction within the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Peters fears that the Conference will have trouble maintaining a sense of direction because the Mennonite Brethren have "borrowed so freely."⁶⁰ Peters believes that the Mennonite Brethren have borrowed heavily from both Anabaptist and evangelical circles and this has left the Mennonite Brethren without their own identity and direction. In order to solve this problem Peters seems to be advocating the creation of a self-understanding that is distinctly Mennonite Brethren yet indebted to both evangelicalism and Anabaptism.

Yet the identity which Peters describes continually vacillates between the poles of evangelicalism and Anabaptism. Peters's own example demonstrates the pull these two poles have on the Mennonite Brethren. Peters describes the difficulty in finding a balance

⁵⁸ Frank C. Peters, "For Such A Time As This," 28.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

between proclamation of Christ and service in the name of Christ. He describes the danger of neglecting physical needs for the sake of verbal evangelism, a critique of evangelicalism, and the opposite extreme of calling every deed done evangelism without actually proclaiming Christ, a concern many Mennonite Brethren had with MCC. His solution to this problem, interestingly, is to view the task of the church as discipleship.⁶¹ Though Peters does not refer to H.S. Bender in this article, the concept of discipleship figures prominently in Bender's "The Anabaptist Vision." Discipleship is an Anabaptist emphasis. Despite his desire to create a unique position for the Mennonite Brethren it appears that Peters, like John Redekop and Harold Jantz uses Anabaptist principles as the adjudicator of evangelical ideas. Whatever else can be said about Peters this article demonstrates that Peters is trying to find a way to fuse both evangelical and Anabaptist ideals. Whether Peters succeeds in finding that unique position is not as important as the observation that Peters is determined to hang on to both evangelicalism and Anabaptism.

Not everyone found it easy to build a self-understanding that fused evangelicalism and Anabaptism. F.C. Peters's once stated that "we want Anabaptism emphasized, it is our heritage, it is our understanding of the Word of God. But we also want the other side - the evangelical side."⁶² In reply to this statement one Mennonite Brethren suggested that this statement sounded more like "a kind of religious schizophrenia" than a way of understanding the Mennonite Brethren church.⁶³ Lora Sawatsky believes that some of the

⁶¹ Ibid., 28.

⁶² Lora Sawatsky, "Two Sides: Evangelicalism and Anabaptism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 23 April 1982, 8.

⁶³ Ibid.

Mennonite Brethren she's come into contact with create two categories, evangelical and Anabaptist. When a desired theological model seems to be missing from the Anabaptist box, Mennonite Brethren go to the evangelical box to fill in the gap. Sawatsky believes that this creates the perception that only one box can be right on certain issues. On the issue of conversion, for example, Sawatsky believes that the Mennonite Brethren and F.C. Peters in particular have decided that the Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship is not a legitimately Christian expression unless it is preceded by an evangelical conversion experience. This kind of thinking is in Sawatsky's opinion confused and schizophrenic. Though it is not clear what kind of theological patterns Sawatsky wants to replace that of F.C. Peters, she is observing some of the results of building an identity between the two poles of evangelical and Anabaptist as well as personal frustration in the attempt to be both.

Another letter to the editor indicates that a different constituent was trying to mesh his Mennonite Brethren beliefs with evangelicalism as well.⁶⁴ Here the author, Abe Enns, states that he is strongly opposed to withdrawing the hand of fellowship from non-Mennonite Christians. Enns is reacting to Kauffman and Harder's work and is shocked that anyone would say that the real threat to Anabaptism is fundamentalism. Anabaptism as Enns understands it "is a literal acceptance of the Scripture and so cannot be threatened by our cooperation with other Christians, even though they are not Mennonites."⁶⁵ This definition of Anabaptism certainly agrees with one of the litmus tests of fundamentalism, the doctrine of inerrancy. Furthermore, "the writings of Menno Simons have convinced [Enns]

⁶⁴ Abe Enns, "Friends or Foes," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 25 July 1975, 10.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

that he [Menno Simons] was a fundamentalist.”⁶⁶ For Enns the tension of being both Mennonite and fundamentalist can be resolved by interpreting both Anabaptism and Menno Simons as being similar in theology with the result that no conflict is created. Where as Redekop uses the term evangelical to denote early Anabaptists, Enns equates Anabaptism with fundamentalism.

The issue of the name change was the arena in which the much larger debate of identity took place. The various ways that the Mennonite Brethren held together both their evangelicalism and Anabaptism are demonstrated in this chapter. The new name which John Redekop proposed identified the Mennonite Brethren equally with both groups. Yet, Redekop almost completely re-invents the meaning of the term evangelical and ends up subordinating the term evangelical to the Anabaptist definition. On the other hand Redekop down plays the Anabaptist peace position in order to argue for continued cooperation with the EFC. Jantz strongly opposed the name change. Even though he grows increasingly more vocal about his concerns with evangelical organizations and even calls for withdrawing from them he still identifies himself as an evangelical. After he left the *Herald* Jantz went on to found a Canadian evangelical periodical, *The Christian Week*. His concern with evangelicalism did not ultimately cause him to abandon it. The members of the Mennonite Brethren Conference span the spectrum of ideas when it comes to integrating evangelicalism and Anabaptism but their words speak of the difficulty of integrating both evangelicalism and Anabaptism. Some wanted to give up their Mennonite Brethren self-understanding and a very small number wanted to end formal ties with other

⁶⁶ Ibid.

evangelicals but the vast majority were determined to remain tied to both. It appears that the desire to hold on to both evangelicalism and Anabaptism is a difficult feat to maintain. Yet it is a effort which many Mennonite Brethren seem determined to make.

CONCLUSION

In the late twentieth century the Mennonite Brethren of Canada believed themselves to be in a crisis of identity. The debate about their self-understanding involved many factors but this thesis contends that a significant component of the crisis was religious, specifically in regards to the relationship between the Mennonite Brethren and evangelicalism. The crisis was manifested in three significant areas. In each of these manifestations the question of the role of evangelical influences was a central issue.

The investigation and interpretation of early Mennonite Brethren religious history was marked by a debate concerning the contribution of evangelicalism in the formative years of the brotherhood. Victor Adrian argued that the Mennonite Brethren church was a child of both Pietism and Anabaptism. Many other scholars refused to go as far as that. J.B. Toews was grateful to Pietism for its positive role in bringing about revival to the Mennonite colonies but balked at the suggestion that the Mennonite Brethren were birthed by Pietism. J.A. Toews believed that an accepting and open attitude towards various

evangelical streams over the past century had left the Mennonite Brethren without a firm understanding of their own theological outlook and thus the result of such openness was the experience of the identity crisis. The debate concerning the role of evangelicalism in the formative years of their history was also an argument about the place that evangelicalism should have in their present relationship to it.

The second symptom of their crisis was the question of denominational designation. Jantz believed that a change of name would result in two significant shifts in church character. First, the Mennonite Brethren would lose their Anabaptist distinctives and heritage and second, they would become indistinguishable from mainstream evangelicalism. Redekop, on the other hand, believed that a change of name would empower the denomination to more fully embrace both the evangelical and Anabaptist traditions. The deliberations on the topic of name change highlight the turmoil of self-understanding which many in the Conference struggled to work out.

The third aspect of the crisis was marked by a concern for theology. Many scholars felt that they needed to verify the Anabaptist nature of the early Mennonite Brethren. They presented the theology of the early Brethren and demonstrated how this framework had changed as a result of their interaction with other evangelical groups. These writers usually viewed the changes as undesirable and called for a return to the theological conceptions of the 1860's. They issued strong warnings concerning the dangers of accepting some of these "foreign" doctrines. They believed that the source of today's theology should be primarily found in the religious framework of the early Brethren. Exactly what the framework had

been became a subject of contention. The investigation and promotion of the theological character of the early Mennonite Brethren church was an attempt to anchor the denomination in a solid foundation and thereby make the members aware of an identity that was, purportedly, already theirs.

The Mennonite Brethren desired to be both evangelical and Anabaptist. It is understandable that they were drawn to the theological heart of the evangelical movement. Their own understanding of the Bible agreed with the evangelical presentation of the gospel. The core of evangelical belief, as described by Bebbington's quadrilateral, seemed very attractive to the Mennonite Brethren and they thought it only logical to join with other evangelicals in various organizations. However, as they became a part of formal evangelical institutions, such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Mennonite Brethren came to realize that the expressions and practices of evangelicalism were out of their control. Although they shared with other evangelicals a basic understanding of the gospel, their configurations had been shaped by a different history. Both John Redekop and Harold Jantz expressed considerable dismay as the EFC and NAE began to endorse policies which the two men felt blatantly contradicted the core of the gospel message. This was most especially true in the areas of pacifism and government and church relationships. They could not change the trends within formal evangelical bodies which they believed undercut the true nature of Christ's message. The Mennonite Brethren embraced the evangelical dimension of the gospel and thought the logical conclusion was an embrace of evangelical organizations as well. As has been demonstrated, however, it was when the Mennonite

Brethren joined the evangelical institutions that they began to realize the differences that separated the two traditions.

Both Redekop and Jantz distanced themselves from the trends within the EFC with which they objected, although in different ways. Jantz recommended a complete withdrawal from the EFC and the NAE. He felt that the theology of peace and separation of church and state were so central to the gospel that to maintain ties with an organization that disregarded these principles was to ignore central aspects of Christian faith. Redekop took a different tack. As president of the EFC he promoted a theology of peace to the evangelical constituents. He justified maintaining affiliation with the EFC by placing the peace position of Anabaptism as a secondary aspect of faith. He argued that this position, while important, should not hinder association with the EFC. But even Redekop had a hard time accepting the more extreme positions of the NAE. Both men exemplify the struggle and tension involved with an embrace of both Anabaptism and evangelicalism.

The discussion concerning religious self-understanding is one that will continue to shape the Mennonite Brethren. Though phrases like "identity crisis" are used less frequently and the issue of the name change has abated, the claims of both Anabaptism and evangelicalism still pull on the heart strings of the denomination. The Mennonite Brethren may feel more secure in who they are but their embrace of the two traditions remains ambivalent.

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