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Foreword

This issue offers three articles reflecting a broad thematic range that explore historical and contemporary matters of interest and importance to the Mennonite community.

In "Moral Tales, Essays, and Letters from Georgia: Representations of Blackness in Three Anabaptist Newspapers," sociologist Timothy Epp examines the portrayal of race and racialized minorities in late 19th- and early 20th-century Anabaptist newspapers. After surveying and analyzing these historical depictions, he comments upon the implications of this portrayal and points to ongoing issues that his study raises.

The next two articles deal with present-day concerns, focusing particularly on the Mennonite Brethren experience in Canada. In "Pathways to Engaging Cultural Diversity by Canadian Mennonite Congregations," Rich Janzen presents case studies of how different MB congregations have adopted distinct practices to reach beyond an initial ethnically homogenous identity. In doing so, he discusses actions particular congregations have taken and the "creative intentionality" underlying these initiatives, before making suggestions for how to move forward on "a longer journey of solidarity with culturally diverse newcomers."

Finally, in "What's in a Narrative? Canadian Mennonite Brethren and the Struggle for Identity," Brian Cooper moves from a historical overview of various streams that have contributed to Mennonite Brethren theology in Canada to discuss the challenging work ahead for the MB denomination to provide grounds for agreement, create cohesion, and achieve a clear denominational identity.

A slate of reviews of recent books on biblical, pastoral, ministerial, and ethical subjects rounds out the issue.

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We welcome submissions of articles or reflections in keeping with the journal's mandate to advance thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology (including biblical studies, ethics, etc.), peace, society, history, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives.

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Moral Tales, Essays, and Letters from Georgia: Representations of Blackness in Three Anabaptist Newspapers

Timothy D. Epp

Abstract

Newspapers have historically served important roles in the shaping of ethno-religious identity among immigrant populations. This article explores the portrayal of race and racialized minorities in three Anabaptist newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: *Zionsbote*, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, and *Evangelical Visitor*. Drawing on recent studies of Mennonite identity and whiteness, I propose that these portrayals contributed to the racialization of Anabaptist readers, reflecting and re-enforcing distinctions between blackness and whiteness within Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren in Christ populations.

Introduction

Newspapers have been established by many groups in North America, including those with a religious foundation. Harry Loewen and James Urry note that many religious groups in North America as well as Europe "took advantage of increasingly affordable printing technology in the nineteenth century to publish magazines and newspapers and distribute them to increasingly literate communities through improved communication networks."[1] By 1880, Anabaptist groups were publishing at least nine religious newspapers in the United States. These papers conveyed inspirational messages, evangelical fervor, and news of the world. They also contributed to the construction of an "imagined community." While Benedict Anderson

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[1] Harry Loewen and James Urry, "A Tale of Two Newspapers: *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (1880-2007) and *Der Bote* (1924-2008)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 86, no. 2 (April 2012): 176.

originally used this term to refer to the nation itself,[2] the "imagined community" of the Anabaptist newspaper was "not the spatial community of village or colony but one based on shared theological understandings and experiences."[3] It was also a community with insiders and outsiders.

In this article I will discuss the boundaries of this community in terms of race, specifically in regard to representations of blackness, in late 19th- and early 20th-century issues of *Zionsbote*, *Evangelical Visitor,* and *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (hereafter *Rundschau*). I will begin by describing the origins, audience, and purpose of each paper. I argue that the 'moral tales' in *Zionsbote* and the *Evangelical Visitor* present Black people as exemplifying positive social value while remaining as 'other' to the reader. I also analyze letters and articles in *Rundschau* that express ambivalence in their depictions of blackness, alternating between challenging the violence perpetrated against Blacks and contributing to racist stereotypes and tropes. My findings suggest that these depictions reflect the approach of their respective denominations and the purpose of the respective paper, whether to provide a forum for mission work or to present news from the larger world. For example, references to "negroes" and "colored people" in the context of moral tales and travelogues corresponded with the missional approach of the *Evangelical Visitor* and *Zionsbote*. In contrast, discussion of race in the *Rundschau* took the form of commentaries on world events, essays on slavery and post-emancipation America, and letters from readers. In conclusion, I will argue that Anabaptist papers often served to reinforce a sense of "whiteness" among readers.[4]

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[2] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2016).

[3] Dora Dueck, "Images of the City in the Mennonite Brethren *Zionsbote* 1890-1940," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 20 (2002): 181.

[4] The results of this study are based on a review of the indexes to *Rundschau* and *Zionsbote* found in the archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Search terms included 'negro', 'Black', 'African American', 'colored,' and 'slavery.' Pertinent articles from *Rundschau* and *Zionsbote* were then scanned and professionally translated. Results from the *Evangelical Visitor* are based on a careful review of this newspaper in hard copy format at the Be in Christ Church Archives in Oakville, Ontario (now located in Port Colborne, Ontario). This review was conducted together with Nathan Brink and Emily Mott, student research assistants from Redeemer University College.

These papers represent the period between 1880 and 1910[5] and provide insight into their perspectives on racial relations in the United States in the post-emancipation era. While recent scholarly work has explored relations between Mennonites of European descent and Blacks during the Civil Rights Movement, the period covered in the present study has not received the same attention. This study contributes to the sociological-historical understanding of the shaping of Anabaptist identity in North America, particularly in regard to race and racialization. In doing so, it addresses the call made by Hubert Brown in *Black and Mennonite*:

> To be brothers and sisters in the Lord we must understand the dynamics of black/white relations and its implications in Christian faith. An examination of the historical nature and development of black/white relations is necessary for understanding the status and reality of their relation today.[6]

Mennonite Identity

Recent literature has paid much attention to challenging the portrayal of Mennonite identity as homogeneous or fixed,[7] revealing the dynamics of identity formation and negotiation throughout Anabaptist history. Beginning at least in the 1980s with the work of such scholars as Rodney Sawatsky,[8] Mennonite history has been recognized as requiring a "a more differentiated and multi-faceted understanding,"[9] since "all treatises of Anabaptism are produced by scholars with particular interests and motivations associated

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[5] I include the article by Herbert Beck from 1924 (see footnote 61) as a later example reflecting general attitudes towards Black people found in my sample.

[6] Hubert Brown, *Black and Mennonite: A Search for Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1976), 98.

[7] Elmer S. Miller, "Marking Mennonite Identity: A Structuralist Approach to Separation," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 252.

[8] Rodney J. Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity: the Dynamics of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1987); Rodney J. Sawatsky, *History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition through History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005).

[9] Karl Koop, "Anabaptist and Mennonite Identity: Permeable Boundaries and Expanding Definitions," *Religion Compass* 8, no. 6 (June 2014): 201.

with specific temporal contexts."[10] As Donald Kraybill writes,

> Mennonite identity consists of socially constructed images which Mennonites hold of themselves. Mennonite identity is externalized or molded by the group's historical experiences, social interaction with other groups, self-designated labels, ideological influences, storytelling, historical reconstructions of the group's legacy in later generations and current experience. [11]

Social scientists have exemplified this approach in their analysis of Mennonite identity within Canadian and American contexts,[12] including attention to the formative processes of immigration and racialization and their implications for personal and group identity. Drawing on postcolonial studies and critical race theory,[13] these studies have addressed the social construction of race, as whiteness and blackness are revealed to be reified categories, concealing processes of racialization informed by (and informing) relations of power and dominance. For example, the experience of immigrating and assimilating to North America often included a reconfiguration of personal and group identity in alignment with the dominant discourse on race. This process was informed partly by presumptions and stereotypes of black and white identities and relationships expressed through print media, as exemplified by Peter Vellon's recent study on Italian immigrants to the US.[14] Immigrant groups such as Italians and Mennonites found that they were situated within a social hierarchy

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[10] Miller, "Marking Mennonite Identity,"251.

[11] Donald B. Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity: The Transformation of Mennonite Ethnicity," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Calvin Wall Redekop and Samuel J. eds. (Lanham, MD : University Press of America; Waterloo, ON: Institute for Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1988), 158.

[12] Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988); James Urry, *Mennonite Politics and Peoplehood: 1525 to 1980* (Winnipeg, MB: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2006).

[13] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1994); Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, Matt Wray, eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001).

[14] Peter G. Vellon, *A Great Conspiracy against Our Race: Italian Immigrant Newspapers and the Construction of Whiteness in the Early 20th Century* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014).

of whiteness, with some groups deemed to be more desirable than others. This was made clear to Doukhobor, Hutterite, and Mennonite immigrants to Canada. On May 1, 1919, an order-in-council was passed by Sir Robert Borden's government to prohibit their immigration on the basis of their "peculiar" lifeways and property holding practices, and an assumption that they would neither assimilate easily into Canadian society nor readily assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizens.[15]

Mennonites themselves have also played significant roles in encouraging cultural assimilation to a white America.[16] While some Anabaptists participated in the Underground Railroad, aiding Blacks fleeing slavery in the 19th century, there are occasional references to Mennonites owning slaves.[17] One man of Mennonite origin even established a white supremacist church in the US.[18] However, the whiteness of Mennonites has most often remained unproblematized, often assumed to be a neutral viewpoint from which to discuss race.[19] The news media provided one channel of power and dominance in shaping and disseminating racial stereotypes.[20] Newspapers played a critical role in shaping Mennonite ethno-religious identity in North America, as identified by James Juhnke: "Mennonite immigrant newspapers became very important for working across congregational and conference lines to integrate the sacred and

[15] Arthur Kroeger, *Hard Passage* (Edmonton, AB: Univ. of Alberta Press, 2007).

[16] Philipp Gollner, "How Mennonites Became White: Religious Activism, Cultural Power, and the City," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 2 (April 2016): 165-93.

[17] Daniel R. Lehman, *Mennonites of the Washington County, Maryland and Franklin County, Pennsylvania Conference* (Lititz, PA: Publication Board of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church and Related Areas, 1990).

[18] Dave Jackson and Neta Jackson, *No Random Act: Behind the Murder of Ricky Birdsong* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2002).

[19] I recognize the importance of situating my own identity within the framework of North American race relations. As a middle-class, white, Russian Mennonite, I realize that my usage of racial terminology is informed by a long history of inequality and privilege in North America. My intent here is to explore the social construction of race and racism among Mennonites, but I also recognize that in doing so I may inadvertently contribute to the dominant discourse on this topic.

[20] Christopher P. Campbell, *Race, Myth and the News* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995); John M. Coward, *Indians Illustrated: The Image of Native Americans in the Pictorial Press* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2016).

the secular, and the ethnic and the American."[21] Below I will address the newspapers' role in contributing to and reproducing dominant discussions on race—and also contributing to the racialization of their readers.

Anabaptist Newspapers

Die Mennonitische Rundschau (roughly, "Mennonite Review") is reportedly "the oldest Mennonite periodical published continuously under one name."[22] First produced on June 5, 1880 by the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana, the *Rundschau* was the successor to the *Nebraska Ansiedler*. The *Ansiedler* had been published primarily for Russian Mennonites living in Nebraska but was available to Mennonites in other states. Providing a Christian interpretation of the news, it carried articles on agricultural, educational, foreign, and economic affairs. The *Rundschau* expanded the readership by directing itself to Russian Mennonite communities on the American and Canadian prairies. It remained a four-page semi-monthly publication until the end of 1882, when it became a weekly. In 1883, circulation increased to include Europe and Asia (in a semi-monthly edition). It was significant in providing a way for Mennonites around the world to communicate with each other: "In an era where long distance communication was difficult, the *Rundschau* became a primary means of sharing information and passing on encouragement."[23] Publication shifted to Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale, Pennsylvania in 1908, and then to Rundschau Publishing House in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1923, which became Christian Press in 1940. The move to Winnipeg reflected the location of the paper's German-speaking readership at that time.[24] In 1945, the paper was purchased by the Mennonite Brethren Church. The final issue was published in January 2007, completing a run of almost 127 years.

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[21] James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1989).

[22] Harold S. Bender and Richard D. Thiessen, "Mennonitische Rundschau, Die (Periodical)." (June 2007). http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonitische_Rundschau,_Die_ (Periodical)&oldid=142804, accessed November 16, 2018.

[23] *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, Centre of Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, MB. https://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/publications/mennonitische-rundschau-die/, accessed November 15, 2018.

[24] Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), 417.

Zionsbote (roughly "Zion's Messenger") was the newspaper of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. First published in the autumn of 1884, it was originally a four-page quarterly selling for 24 cents per year. It became a semi-monthly in 1886 and increased to eight pages in 1889. By 1904 it was a weekly with 16 pages. Like the *Rundschau*, *Zionsbote* was first published by the Mennonite Publishing Company at Elkhart, Indiana, but shifted locations several times and by 1913 was located in Hillsboro, Kansas. *Zionsbote* was established "to acquaint the churches with the work in the field of evangelism and church polity in order to stimulate the church life,"[25] and featured reports from mission fields and from individual congregations, primarily in the US. The paper eventually had an international readership, with churches in Russia carrying it until 1914. Dora Dueck describes the content of *Zionsbote* this way:

> The *Zionsbote* relied on its readers, usually members of MB churches, for content, though material was also "borrowed" from other periodicals when needed to fill the pages. Ministers contributed theological writings, members shared experiences or devotional thoughts or news, and "correspondents" sent regular reports from the congregations. The paper had an epistolary feel to it. While the *Zionsbote's purpose* was to serve spiritual goals and communicate matters pertaining to church life. other information was also communicated—health, weather, crops, visits, moves, deaths, weddings and births. Travel reports and conversion stories were popular topics.[26]

The *Evangelical Visitor* was established by the Brethren in Christ church in 1887 as a "useful medium for evangelism and the spread of new ideas,"[27] with the two goals of spreading evangelical truths and unifying the church.[28] In his bicentennial history of the Brethren in Christ in Canada, E.

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[25] P.H. Berg, "Zionsbote (Periodical)." (1959). http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Zionsbote_(Periodical)&oldid=123142, accessed November 16, 2018.

[26] Dueck, "Images of the City," 180-81.

[27] C. Hostetter, E. Morris Sider and Sam Steiner, "Brethren in Christ Church." (September 2018). http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Brethren_in_Christ_Church&oldid=161484, accessed November 16, 2018.

[28] Micah B. Brickner, "One of God's Avenues of Progress: Exploring the Outcomes of the

Morris Sider writes that

> Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Brethren in Christ, over several decades, accepted a series of new activities and institutions that would modify the nature of their church life and doctrine, most significantly in the direction of a greater emphasis on the experiential, pietistic element in their heritage.[29]

Sider notes that this paper's influence "as a vehicle for change on both sides of the border cannot be overstated . . . it became the most widely used of all the ways in which new ideas were spread."[30]

Moral Tales

Some of my own first impressions of race and racial relations were formed at my grandmother's house in Saskatchewan. I remember her baby doll with skin darker than my own, but my most salient memory is of *Der Struwwelpeter*, a famous 1845 children's book by Heinrich Hoffmann. Amid images of the title character with his incredibly long fingernails, the scissor-man, and *bösen Friedrich* (wicked Frederick), who tormented both animals and humans, was *Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben,* the story of "the black boys." In this story, a "wooly-headed black-a-moor"[31] out for a summer's day stroll is plagued with teasing by three boys on account of his skin color, which they describe as "black as ink." Saint Nicholas, seeing this harassment, reminds the boys that "Blacky" couldn't change his skin color if he tried, and tells them to leave the "poor fellow" alone. When the teasing continues, St. Nicholas takes the three boys and dips them in ink as punishment for teasing "harmless" Blacky. The story aims to evoke pity for its main character, and in doing so it also distances readers from Blacky and situates them in a position

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Evangelical Visitor," *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 50, No. 3 (December 2017): 322-34, https://bic-history.org/journal-articles/one-of-gods-avenues-of-progress-exploring-the-outcomes-of-the-evangelical-visitor/, accessed November 16, 2018.

[29] E. Morris Sider, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada: Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1988), 103

[30] Ibid.

[31] The term 'black-a-moor' is a reference to the enslavement and subservience of Africans, as Princess Michael of Kent recently learned. See *Bethan Holt, "Princess Michael of Kent prompts controversy after wearing 'racist' 'blackamoor' brooch to lunch with Meghan Markle," The Daily Telegraph (London), December 22, 2017.*

of moral superiority. The actions of Saint Nicholas (a powerful symbol of whiteness and purity) are portrayed as benevolent and protective; however, they also rob the central character of any sense of agency or personhood. Blacky remains a passive victim, both offended against and saved by white characters, in a lesson directed to white readers.

Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren newspapers didn't feature cautionary tales as much as what I call 'moral tales'—stories with characters (in this case Black people) through which desirable morals are exemplified. On May 1, 1890 the *Evangelical Visitor* published the following story, entitled "An Example of Forgiveness":

> An old colored Christian woman was going along the streets of New York with a basket of apples that she had for sale. A rough sailor ran against her and upset the basket, and stood back expecting to hear her scold frightfully; but she stooped down and picked up the apples, and said "God forgive you, my son, as I do." The sailor saw the meanness of what he had done, felt in his pocket for his money, and insisted that she should take it all. Though she was colored, he called her mother, and said, "Forgive me mother; I will never do anything so mean again."[32]

The article is anonymously authored, but its "selected" designation suggests that it is a reprint from another source. Several things should be noted about this piece. First, only the first character is identified as to age, skin color, religion, and gender. The other is simply "a rough sailor." Second, each of the woman's identity traits positions her as "other" to the sailor. The sailor is male (although this isn't stated immediately, and the reader must make this assumption), and relatively young (he eventually refers to the woman as "mother"). His religion is not identified, but his behavior runs counter to that of the Christian woman. Finally, he is not identified by his skin color, but the phrase "though she was colored" positions him as other than Black. In this way "whiteness becomes an unmarked and invisible term, while a racialized subjectivity is carried by those with darker skins."[33] The

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[32] "An Example of Forgiveness," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 1, 1890.
[33] Melanie Suchet, "A Relational Encounter with Race," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 14, no. 4 (2004): 432.

basket of apples furthermore suggests that the woman may rely on this simple product for her livelihood, which adds to the frailty of her existence. Unlike the story in *Struwwelpeter*, here the woman is depicted as having agency, as in her response to the sailor. In spite of her positioning as the vulnerable person, her response of forgiveness reveals her inner strength and provides a turning point, an opportunity for the sailor to change his ways.[34] However, the location of racial difference in the woman as "other" also situates the reader in a dominant social dichotomy of black/white relations.[35]

    The second moral tale from the *Evangelical Visitor* was published on June 15, 1892, authored by Sister N. Baker, under the title "From Phoenix, Arizona." This time the tale is told as a personal account of Sister Baker, who received the story from 'a lady'.

> I heard a lady tell lately of boarding at a place where the Mrs. had five children and she kept a colored cook and the cook had a poor delicate little child. The lady boarder was often annoyed with the land lady's five children jumping in the rooms, quarrelling and things so very disagreeable, and the mother never reproved or spoke a word of correction; but one day to the boarder's surprise, the house lady said she was near crazy with the noise of the cook's child. The boarder said she could not understand how that could be—for a mother that could overlook five romping, quarrelling, disagreeable children because they were her own and allow herself to get crazed with a cry for want of perhaps proper care from its busy mother. It was a poor little fatherless child. Oh how ready we are by nature to justify our own, but this

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[34] I recently presented this study at an academic conference; an African American woman in attendance remarked with some frustration, "It seems that Blacks are always expected to be forgiving."

[35] This story has been retold in various forms. One recent variation appears in *Life to the Full* by the Reverend Cecil A. Newell (see lulu.com, 2014). Here the setting is New York, and the "old Negro woman" is not identified as Christian (but presumed to be, as she forgives the sailor). The rationale for her act of forgiveness is provided: "if she had given off and cursed him it would only have made him more eager to find pleasure at her expense." When she forgives the man, she gives him "a look of mingled pity and sorrow and kindliness." This version ends by stating that "forgiveness is an attitude and heart-changing power."

must be very evil in the sight of God.[36]

Here the central character is identified in terms of gender (female), profession (cook), and the role of parent (single mother). While her gender isn't mentioned until near the end, the roles of both cook and parent leave the reader to assume that the character is female. The story focuses even more attention on the cook's child, whose gender is unknown. The child is described in terms of pity—"a poor delicate little child" and "a poor little fatherless child"—in stark contrast to the landlady's children, twice described as "disagreeable." The reason for the Black child's pitiable state is the absence of its father and the lack of "proper care from its busy mother." The dark-skinned characters are again positioned as "other," this time in contrast to societal ideals of wealth and family. The racial trope of charity re-enforces assumptions of white power and privilege, as the reader identifies with the lady in expressing annoyance towards the house mother and pity towards the colored cook and her child.

Sister Baker also wrote a travel letter in February of the same year, in which she describes her trip to Arizona:

> There were several families on our car, some for Tempe, others for Phoenix, others for California. They were all very sociable. We engaged in pleasant chats, sometimes in singing; even the colored porters joined us in singing, and I will remark one aged gentleman had retired for the night, but he was so overjoyed with the singing he arose and came to our end of the car, and joined us. . . . Tuesday evening. It is now tea time, the porter comes around and puts down our tables. We spread out our linen, Louisa bakes the potatoes while each one hurries up and down the aisle with coffee and tea pitcher. We just enjoyed our supper more than a little; had all the luxuries necessary. When we had that all put aside the porter came around again and let down our beds and fixed them all ready for us—each family had their own berth, then drew the curtains and we retired for the night and had a good night's rest.[37]

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[36] Sister N. Baker, "From Phoenix, Arizona," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 15, 1892, 186-87.
[37] Sister N. Baker, "Our Trip to Arizona," *Evangelical Visitor* February 1, 1892, 44.

The "colored" people are again identified in terms of their jobs, this time as railroad porters.[38] The word "even'" distinguishes the narrator and traveling companions from Blacks. The travelers are "very sociable," engaging in "pleasant chats" and savoring their supper, while the porters automatically perform their appointed tasks, providing the stage on which the white travelers enjoy their trek, leaving the racial hierarchy of black/white relations unchallenged, except for the occasional bout of singing.[39]

The one other reference to a Black person in the *Evangelical Visitor* during the period covered in this study is an obituary from 1905 written by Asa Bearss, originally of Quaker origin and a leader in the Brethren in Christ church. Bearss describes Henry Shield, the deceased, as "a black American born in Maryland who had come to Canada some fifty years earlier . . . very honest and upright man and a good neighbour, and like our African race, of *a pure type* [italics are my own]."[40] This reference to "pure type" seems to reflect pseudo-scientific beliefs about clearly defined racial categories and the dangers of miscegenation, often promoted during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (and still today by white supremacist groups).[41]

Zionsbote published two moral tales considerably longer than those in the *Evangelical Visitor*. The first, from November 11, 1903, is entitled "A Negro's Loyalty." Roger Jerrit, the title character, is an "old trustworthy servant" concerned for the well-being of his "massa," Judge Puliver. Puliver has been unable to pay his mortgage, and Colonel Lane who holds it is eager

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[38] Given the racial situation at the time, the porters, and perhaps Louisa the cook, may have been the only Blacks on "White" railroad cars. See the University of Nebraska-Lincoln web page "Railroads and the Making of Modern America: The Origins of Segregation": railroads.unl.edu/topics/segregation/php.

[39] The role of the Black porter exemplified racial segregation in North America, but also provided an opportunity for social and political advancement for men. See Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[40] Asa Bearss, "Obituary," *Evangelical Visitor,* May 15, 1905, 16. While social scientists have for many years critiqued and deconstructed categorical racism, this way of thinking remains prevalent in society. See Michael Yudell, *Race Unmasked: Biology and Race in the 20th Century* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2014), and Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014).

[41] See Elise Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2002).

to cast Puliver off his plantation. Jerrit is so frustrated that he has "tears streaming down his cheeks." In contrast, Colonel Lane is a "tough guy" with a "powerful voice." When horses bolt with Lane's wife in the carriage, Jerrit rides after her to save her. He appears as an unlikely hero in this story. Lane, failing to recognize him, calls out, "Who are you, courageous one?" Jerrit answers and Lane offers him a reward. Jerrit refuses to take anything but presses Lane to forgive Judge Puliver's mortgage. Lane eventually relents and hands the mortgage to Jerrit.

> "Roger," said the colonel, gently putting his hand on the Negro's shoulder while his eyes welled up with tears. "Roger, you think I am a tough man – I was that, yes, but I do have a soft spot, and you have found it. Here – take this envelope – now Mr. Puliver is once again free and the sole owner of his home. Here, he will understand."[42]

That Jerrit has helped Lane find his "soft spot" recalls the story of the "old colored Christian woman" from the *Evangelical Visitor*. The hierarchy of colonel/judge/servant remains intact. At the end of the story, Jerrit's reward from Puliver is a long handshake. Although blackness is associated with courage and forgiveness, and leads to the humbling of tough sailors and colonels, the social status of Black people remains the same.

The second moral tale from *Zionsbote*, "Two Noble Negroes," was published on August 17, 1910. The setting is in the Indian Ocean, between Reunion Island and the coast of Madagascar, and then at a Mediterranean resort. The main characters are Madame Lascelles and her four-year-old son, and two men described as "negroes" from Senegal. As the French ship St. Ives was returning home to Madagascar, carrying its captain, sailors, and the mother and child (on their way home to Lyon, presumably from a Reunion Island resort), it encountered "a raging storm" that threatened to sink it. When Madame Lascelles and her son emerged on deck, the captain directed them to their only hope of survival, a lifeboat "dancing like an empty shell on the wild waves."

> "We have to go in there?" the poor woman cried out in horror, clutching her child to her breast. "The waves will swallow us

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[42] "Eines Negers Treue," *Zionsbote,* November 11, 1903, 3.

before we can even enter the boat!"[43]

Two men suddenly appear beside Madame Lascelles and her son, their composure appearing in stark contrast to the mother's pale face and sense of horror.[44]

> "Have no fear, madam!" Exclaimed a sturdy negro beside her. "My brother, Achill and I will bring you safely to the boat." He took the boy in his arms while Achill helped Madame Lascelles. Although fearful for their lives, they soon reached the boat. They had barely left the ship when the roaring waves devoured it.

However, a new danger develops as the lifeboat fills with water. The sailors cast angry glances at the mother and child, whom they consider to be expendable, and begin to murmur about tossing them off the boat. Again, the brothers come to the rescue.

> "If you want to lighten the load," called Achill, "blacks are heavier than Madame. Swear that you will let Madame and her child live, and my brother and I will jump into the ocean." It took only a minute, and as soon as they had received the promise from the astonished sailors, the two negroes sprang overboard and disappeared into the roaring waves. The lighter boat was much easier to handle, the storm gradually died down, and the shipwrecked were rescued by an English ship three days later.

The story concludes at a Mediterranean resort, as Madame Lascelles and her family are "relaxing on the beach." She overhears a conversation about "two black fellows" washed up on the shore "just south of the Cape of Good Hope." Refusing to return to their home in Senegal, they were determined to go to France "to look for their owner," whom they had identified as Madame Lascelles. A happy reunion ensues.

> A few minutes later the two negroes, having miraculously escaped death, ran toward her and hugged the little boy with cries of joy. From that day on there were no happier, but also no better cared for servants than these two in all of Southern France.

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[43] "Zwei Edle Neger," *Zionsbote,* August 17, 1910, 7.

[44] The contrast between the brothers and Madame also suggests a divide based on social class.

Perhaps the Senegalese men saw an opportunity to better their lives by taking on the roles of servants to the French family. What the story makes clear is that the values of compassion and courage once again are found in Black people, although it also reinforces the roles of master and servant. In doing so, the author implies that Black people are to be commended for their acts of courage and compassion, but that these acts are also to be expected of them.

In summary, the moral tales found in the *Evangelical Visitor* and in *Zionsbote*, while perhaps appearing as relatively positive portrayals of blackness in contrast to those found in other literature of the late 19th- and early 20th-century,[45] nonetheless also served to reinforce racial hierarchies and power relations. These tales depicted Black people as servants, porters, and apple-sellers in naturalized social positions while failing to challenge the structures of inequality that these roles represented. While these men and women were identified as characterizing qualities of compassion and courage, and while these qualities were transformative in the lives of others (most often Whites), their own situations of poverty and servanthood were treated as a matter-of-fact. Readers were encouraged to find moral qualities in the "other," to express compassion and pity towards Black characters, and to identify with them but at the same time to maintain boundaries of gender, age, and race.

Commentaries

The *Rundschau* also conveyed representations of blackness, and often expressed ambivalence towards the Blacks' social situation. At times the paper was very critical of Black people, but at other times it critiqued the treatment of Blacks by Whites, albeit often from a stance of pity. References to blackness appeared most often in commentaries on world events, full-length articles on Blacks and issues of race, and letters from readers. As in the

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[45] Black people were often portrayed in early postcards, film, and literature as violent beasts. See Wayne Martin Mellinger, "Postcards from the Edge of the Color Line: Images of African Americans in Popular Culture 1893-1917," *Symbolic Interaction* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 413-33; W. D. Griffiths, *Birth of a Nation* [film], 1914. They were also portrayed as intellectually subnormal in both popular literature and scientific documentation. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

Evangelical Visitor and *Zionsbote*, the authors were most often anonymous,[46] and the articles appear at least in some cases to be reprints from other papers.

Commentaries on national events expressed ambivalence about the situation facing Blacks and the appropriate response to their suffering. On June 9, 1886 the *Rundschau* featured an anonymous[47] article entitled "Negro Wanderings,"[48] focusing on the Exoduster movement of Blacks from southern states to Kansas,[49] with people fleeing from racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, from oppressive laws known as the "Black Codes," and from general anti-emancipation sentiment.

The article was somewhat sympathetic to the plight of the migrants, reporting that the "Negroes" were arriving "in the most deplorable conditions, and were dependent on welfare." However, the author tends to be most sympathetic towards southern farmers who employed Blacks: "one would think that the white landowners should do everything in their power to keep their renters and their workers." In contrast, Black people and their migration are depicted as subject to unfounded rumors. Arriving with the expectation of "40 acres, a mule and Paradise," many Blacks experienced disappointment upon their arrival. The article suggests that they may have been better off in the South.

> The Negros complain that land rental is too high and the laws of the land are so unfavorable toward them that it is impossible for them to earn enough for even the basic necessities never mind putting aside any savings. They have heard that land rental is cheaper in the West and the Negro is more humanely treated by the whites. Perhaps, like all wanderers, they will experience some disappointments. However, they should be able to find

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[46] My assumption is that it may have been commonplace to reprint anonymous essays from other newspapers. This practice may have distanced the paper from the author of an essay, thus relieving it of some responsibility for its content.

[47] While letters and articles may often reflect contrasting perspectives on a topic, in this study both types of documents express similar sentiments towards Black people. However, the sample is quite small.

[48] "Neger = Wanderungen," *Rundschau,* June 9, 1886, 3.

[49] Bryan M. Jack, *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters* (Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2007); Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992).

fertile land. However, there is also much fertile land in the states they are leaving.

Identifying Blacks as "wanderers" takes away from the immediacy of the oppression they faced. The migration is instead depicted as a misguided effort, with negative implications for white landowners, including Mennonites.

On April 9, 1902, the *Rundschau* reprinted an anonymous article from *Weltbote*—another German-language newspaper, published in Allentown, Pennsylvania—entitled "The Negro Race in the United States." The article provided statistics on an increase to "Negro" populations in northern states, corresponding to a decrease of this population in the South. While appearing at first to be filing an objective report, the author employs language that suggests an underlying concern about this migration.

> This wandering and dispersing of the colored race, which will probably continue is seen by those who are studying the Negro question as a movement which will contribute toward providing a solution to the present difficulties.[50]

To its credit, the *Rundschau* was critical of violence against Blacks. In September 1886, it reprinted an article from the *Westliche Post,* a German-language daily published in St. Louis, Missouri, about "criminal slavery in the Southern States."[51] Entitled "New Negro Slaves in the South," the article identifies punishment for "Negros" charged with insignificant crimes as "cruel": "In most of the southern states the rule of law that no one is guilty until proven does not apply to the colored folks." Black offenders must pay for their own criminal trials, lengthening their sentences. They are "badly fed and clothed and when they fall ill they are completely neglected. This, together with unsanitary conditions explains the high rate of mortality that exists among these inmates." In a commentary on this article, the *Rundschau*

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[50] "Die Negerrasse in den Vereinigten Staaten," *Rundschau,* April 9, 1902, 15. While some incidents of racial violence occurred in northern states at the turn of the century, here the reference to "'present difficulties" may reflect both the incidence of poverty and destitution among Black migrants, and the competition for jobs, particularly on the railroad, between Black people and recent European immigrants. See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008).

[51] "Neue Negersclaven im Sueden," *Rundschau,* September 1, 1886, 2.

editor observes that "even if only half of what is reported proves to be true, these circumstances are more shocking than previously thought." Perhaps some Mennonites were becoming aware of the injustices and hardships faced by Black people in post-slavery America.

However, one of the most horrific accounts of racial violence expresses a sense of ambivalence. An article headed "Burned at the Stake"[52] in the November 21, 1900 issue covered the execution of Preston Porter Jr., who is identified as the murde"rer of an eleven-year-old white girl in Limon, Colorado. His punishment, at the hands of a mob led by the girl's father, was to be burned at the stake. The article described his death this way: "the torture suffered by the black one as the flames licked at his flesh, [was] evident in the terrible grimaces of his face and the cries and moans that he emitted from time to time."[53]

While the author of this commentary does not question Porter's guilt, he identifies the townspeople as a "mob" and violence against Blacks as a "cancer that has invaded our rich and beautiful country."

> Has the negro become better by being slowly roasted to death? Have the poor parents been compensated for the loss of their daughter? Has humanity as a whole improved by one hair due to this terrible trial by lynching? No. Instead of one murderer we now have 300.

Although the article expresses considerable sympathy for Porter, it also categorically identifies Blacks as in need of correction—but not by fire. Instead they are to be transformed into "respectable" human beings:

> The Negro plays an exceptional role in the life of the American people. It has cost enormous sums of money and thousands of human lives to civilize our black brother by educating him to become a full fledged citizen of our country. We Americans are extreme. Every travelling salesman, every circus, every theatre

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[52] While in the context of a Mennonite newspaper this may at first suggest an identification between Anabaptist persecution and the fate of Preston Porter Jr., here it seems rather to reflect the headlines in other newspapers. For example, the article in the *Leadville Herald Democrat*, November 17, 1900, was entitled "Porter Burned at Stake."

[53] "Auf dem Scheiterhaufen Verbrannt," *Rundschau*, November 21, 1900, 6-7.

troupe has its Negro. It seems the American cannot help himself without his Negro. He either makes him into a little private idol or he lynches him. The first is foolish, but the other is sinful. Isn't it about time that the government of the United States goes to work in a thorough fashion to make the Negro of the South into a person, and if at all possible, into a Christian?

References to "our country" and "we Americans" serve to align the reader with the author. While the Negro is identified as "our black brother," he needs transformation. The article leaves the impression that without the benevolence of white people, including the Anabaptist reader, the "Negro" will remain uncivilized—neither American, nor a person, nor a Christian.

The *Rundschau* was also critical of political reform threatening to restrict the voting rights of Blacks in Oklahoma and Georgia. On July 24, 1907, a news article reported on the promises of recently-elected Governor Hoke Smith that would restrict the vote in Georgia:

> The majority of the Negroes will lose their voting rights due to the last three conditions. All under the pretense of rights— but in reality, only injustice and arbitrariness. When it comes to questions of race it is difficult to preach common sense and fairness.[54]

On February 5, 1908, the *Rundschau* printed a similar critique of a recent bill proposed by Senator C.T. Taylor to deprive those unable to read of their right to vote, with the exception of any whose ancestors held voting rights. In essence, illiterate Whites could still vote but many Blacks would not be able to. "It is obvious that this regulation is the most effective in depriving the Negro of his rights," observed the paper, "because it would be most difficult to find anyone other than a Negro whose grandfather did not possess the right to vote."[55] Yet even here the challenge is not to the social structure of inequality itself but to the means of upholding it: "It is understandable that those in the South do not want to be ruled by Negros, but to avoid this is sometimes quite problematic."[56] Even if condemning the

[54] "Zeitereignisse," *Rundschau*, July 24, 1907, 13-16.
[55] "Zeitereignisse," *Rundschau*, February 5, 1908, 14.
[56] "Zeitereignisse," *Rundschau*, July 24, 1907, 13-16.

harshest of punishments for those defying the color line, such commentaries also maintained the prevailing racial division.

Essays

The *Rundschau* also featured several full-length articles, or essays, on topics pertaining to Black people in the US and abroad. The first of these, "The African Slave Trade," was published on January 23, 1889. It may be another reprint, as it is based on a lecture given by "Dr. Buettner, of the Central Club for Geography and Trade in Berlin."[57] The article discusses practices of patriarchal hierarchy among the "black tribes" of South West Africa, noting that the practice of slavery is foreign to these tribes, and that "as soon as a person becomes something to be bought or sold the patriarchal relationship which gives the rules and the servant equal rights and obligations is disturbed. Stealing people seems to be foreign to the African." The article identifies English attempts to stop the slave trade but concludes with a warning: "Unless the blacks arm themselves, it will be impossible to stop this hunt [for slaves] in the interior of Africa. Individual crusades and individual Europeans achieve nothing."

The second essay, published in the August 3, 1898 issue, was entitled "Education of Negroes in the German African Colonies and in America." A reprint from the German-language newspaper *Der Westen*, it describes what its author considers the innate qualities of Black people and the inevitable failure of educational programs for this population. While referring to German colonization of Africa as "civilizing" and fueled by "philanthropical zeal," the article describes Africans as follows:

> With a few exceptions, their mental capacity is comparable to that of a child. Their animalistic instincts[58] and almost uncontrollable sensuality rule their behaviour. Their character also displays conspicuous contradictions—although they are

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[57] "Der Afrikanishe Slavenhandel," *Rundschau*, January 23, 1889, 2.

[58] The comparison of humans to animals, a racist trope with a long history, continues to demonstrate staying power. See Wulf D. Hund and Charles W. Mills, "Comparing black people to monkeys has a long, dark simian history," *The Conversation*, February 28, 2016, http://theconversation.com/comparing-black-people-to-monkeys-has-a-long-dark-simian-history-55102, accessed January 24, 2019.

jovial and light-hearted, they also display a manifold cruelty toward people and animals that is simply outrageous. They have an undeniable inclination toward laziness and this seems to be the main reason for the darker side of their way of life. The old saying "laziness is the beginning of every vice" totally applies to them. For this reason, all efforts in educating them should be made to counteract this dangerous inclination.[59]

Drawing on Booker T. Washington's argument for *industrial* education for Blacks, the article contends that "the blacks must first be taught to love their work and be convinced that their efforts will have positive results." In contrast, education for the sake of knowledge is misguided, as "those Negros who have remained simple and uneducated workers are not only the most useful and the most industrious, but also the most prosperous and the happiest." Early childhood education must therefore establish the virtues of "industriousness, love of order, cleanliness, and proper behaviour." Younger Black people who gain an education become "unhappy" and "unreliable in their work." They "push for positions in the cities, use their education to swindle and provoke their fellow tribesman to riot and to reject the social order." That they become a burden to society is the result of an imbalance between cognitive development, "their heart culture," and their "physical capabilities."

> The decision regarding providing high schools for the colored youth can be quite calmly left to the future. If one provides a classical upbringing to them in the condition in which they find themselves at this time, it is similar to giving stones to those who are asking for bread.

In stark contrast, the article presents the German people as ever "industrious—gorgeous characteristics and virtues distinguish them." In that light, "We need to ask ourselves why we are in such a hurry to educate the black and less gifted race."

A third essay on race appeared that year, in the November 30 issue. Once again, it is anonymous. Entitled "Racial Wars in our Southern States,"

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[59] "Negerschulung in den Deutsch-Afrikanischen Kolonien und in America," *Rundschau*, August 3, 1898, 2.

it begins by referring to "the Negro problem," specifically in regard to events in Wilmington, North Carolina, where Blacks had been the subjects of racial violence, including several shootings. Although the article identifies their "crime" as having "insisted on their rights as citizens," it concedes that "of course, we cannot blame the whites in the South, chafing under the corrupt leadership of the coloreds, that they want to take things into their own hands."[60] The article nevertheless argues that the "powerful and murderous drive of the whites against the colored" must be stopped, as "these racial wars make a mockery of our free institutions. The lawless drifting, manifested in the latter days in several of the southern states in the slaughtering, dispersing and mocking of the colored population must come to an end."

Finally, the December 24, 1924 issue of the paper (by then based in Winnipeg) included an article entitled "How Long Will the White Race Continue to Dominate?" Author Herbert Beck claimed the "greatest danger" was the "population increase of the colored," noting that Black people (from Africa) had doubled their population within 40 years:

> Is there, then, a method of keeping the dominion of the whites in place? Above all, it is in fostering the means and abilities that this dominion has provided. Only by way of their independence and by freely fighting to develop the superiority of their abilities; only by testifying to the solidarity of the white population, like the yellows have done with their highly successful propaganda, will this happen. Given the disunity of the whites, (quite obvious by their engagement in a world war) it is highly unlikely.[61]

Beck seems to have been a resident of Switzerland, but the publication of this article in the *Rundschau* in the 1920s suggests something of the paper's general approach to issues of race at that time.

While challenging the cruelty of the slave trade, these essays provide negative depictions of African culture and of Black people, who are considered dangerous, deficient in intelligence and work ethic, and a threat to the civilized world. The reader may be left with a sense of injustice and

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[60] "Rassenkampfe in unseren Sud-staaten," *Rundschau*, November 30, 1898, 2.
[61] Herbert Beck, "Wie lange dauert noch die Herrschaft der weiszen Rasse?," *Rundschau*, December 24, 1924, 5.

concern, but stereotypes of the "other" and the other's inferiority remain intact.

Letters

Two letters published in the *Rundschau* in 1906 dealt with relations between Mennonites and local people and Blacks in Georgia. It is noteworthy that this Mennonite presence in Georgia predates other records of Mennonite activity in that state. These letters may have had particular significance as first-person accounts from the mission field.

The first letter was written by A.B. Kolb, who may be the child of Jacob Z. and Maria Kolb of Berlin, Ontario (now Kitchener). Jacob and Maria either adopted or raised another young man, Charlie Jones. Charlie joined the Waterloo District Conference by being baptized at First Mennonite Church in Berlin. In William Uttley's local history, Charlie is referred to as "a Negro [. . .] who had been raised by the Kolb family and could talk Pennsylvania Dutch like a streak."[62] According to Uttley, Charlie worked on an inter-racial threshing team.

A.B. Kolb had moved to the United States as a young man, and became a teacher of students including Orville and Wilbur Wright. By 1886, he was assistant editor at the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana. He worked there until shortly before his death. A biography by Sam Steiner identifies Kolb as

> a leader when the Mennonite Church began to build mission and educational institutions. He was an early promoter of Sunday school conferences, and served as President of the Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board.[63]

Steiner notes that Kolb served as "an important link between US and Canadian Mennonites within the Mennonite Church." We should keep these elements of Kolb's life in mind as we consider his letter, in regard to the weight readers may have accorded to his account.

Writing from Elkhart, Kolb begins by addressing readers: "I have

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[62] William Velores Uttley, *A History of Kitchener, Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: The Chronicle Press, 1937), 338.

[63] Sam Steiner, "Kolb, Abram B. (1862-1925)." (January 2002). http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Kolb,_Abram_B._(1862-1925)&oldid=143301. accessed November 16, 2018.

mentioned previously that I would try to write something about the Negro question for the 'Rundschau.' What I have to say stems only from what I have experienced or observed."[64] He refers to an article he had authored in 1892 in an "English" paper, in which he had apparently portrayed Blacks in a relatively positive light and for which he had been "taken to task by our dear brothers in Virginia." After careful thought, Kolb had travelled to Georgia to study the "Negro question" for a year. His research grew to include inter-racial relations "simply because the blacks imitate the whites in so many ways." He then recounts his findings. First, "one drop of Negro blood makes a Negro. His skin may be lily white but he will always be classified as a Negro." He later reiterates this point: "under black one naturally includes all that are not completely white." Kolb warns a Black who tries to pass as White that "the least he will get is an invitation, with threat included, to make himself scarce as quickly as possible." He identifies Blacks as having "very low moral standards" and as part of an "ever increasing evil."

For Kolb, the Black population in Georgia was characterized by laziness, rampant disease including syphilis and tuberculosis, and lack of ambition: "when they are not watched, they don't amount to much." Although he argues against the "inhumane punishments and brutal treatment" of Blacks, he warns that they are undisciplined and lack "proper upbringing and training"—especially "the young ones." Laziness is characterized by vice, and academic education only serves to worsen the situation, as they "live under the illusion that they can now live their lives without working. . . . [They] become a worthless group because they not only despise other Negroes, but also Whites who work on the land." Farmers have become disillusioned with their Black workers, says Kolb, and have replaced them with other immigrants, often Italians.

> One of these beautiful mornings the Southern Negro will awaken and discover that as a result of his fate, he has lost his place as a worker in the South and will never regain it because others have taken over and will keep it.

He concludes with these words: "no race or class will be worth as much as the immigration of 20,000 German farmers. I believe the South will

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[64] A.B. Kolb, "Vereinigte Staaten: Elkhart, Indiana," *Rundschau*, June 13, 1906, 4-5.

get them once they discover the opportunities that await them."

    The second letter, written by A. Hiebert, comes from Pinia, Georgia—a community on the Dooly Southern Railway according to maps from 1895, 1899, and 1904,[65] but also referred to as Penia Station on an 1899 map. Writing from "the very bottom" of the United States, Herbert notes that "all of the Germans" are happy and in good health. However, "our harvest was weaker this year than what we normally anticipate." Then he begins to address "the race issue." He refers to articles in German papers from "northern states" that have featured "insightful articles on this issue."[66] He goes on to say that "the northern citizens in general are much too positive in their assessment of the Negroes." He notes that he speaks for Germans in general in that "our sympathy for the Negroes has strongly diminished." This is the result of the "mistake" of granting Blacks "full freedom": "on the average, [they are] even less are suited to full freedom as citizens than the Russians were to the Republic."

    Hiebert distinguishes between Northern and Southern "Negroes," with those in the South being "less raw." He states that attempts to make progress with Negroes in the North have been only partially successful, and that neither the South nor the North wants to receive them "in mass." He encourages individual Blacks to move North, as northerners "feel that they have been called to regard them as their protégé." However, he expresses ambivalence about his subject, since by the end of the letter he has committed to employing "a dozen or more of them part time again next year. Finally, they have to have something to eat and the pastor has to have a place to live, and there has to be something so they can 'frolic' and finally, a little bit of work."

    Letters from the mission field undoubtedly had an impact on the Anabaptist readers, conveying a first-person account of racial relations in Georgia. As missionaries in the field, both Kolb and Hiebert presumably enjoyed some status within the church, and their words would have been influential in forming racial attitudes and identities among readers.

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[65] "Georgia Place Names—Dooly County," https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/doolycopn.htm, accessed November 15, 2018.
[66] A. Hiebert, "Vereinigte Staaten: Pinia, Georgia," *Rundschau*, December 19, 1906, 5.

Conclusion

The newspapers discussed here contributed to a sense of community among their readers in the spheres of language, religion, and culture. However, the papers also contributed to the social construction of the "other," in this case the Black person, and to the racialization of readers in terms of black/white relations. Although the moral tales in *Zionsbote* and *Evangelical Visitor* identified Black people as possessing positive values of courage and loyalty, little attention was given to the realities of their daily lives, including oppression at the hands of Whites. Instead, the message seems to be that Blacks exemplified these positive characteristics *in spite of* their racial identities. Although commentaries, articles, and letters in the *Rundschau* at times challenged the violence and oppression perpetrated against Black people, they also drew on racial tropes of blackness to the extent of viewing "the colored race" as a threat to Whites. Statements contrasting the character of Blacks with the virtues of German people appear particularly ominous today, in light of recent scholarship on the historical relationship between Mennonites and German nationalism.[67] Even in the moral tales, Black people were presented as marginalized in their socioeconomic status. In a sense, many Anabaptists straddled the boundaries between being "outsiders" themselves and being part of the dominant society. Moral tales, letters, and essays as printed in these newspapers provided avenues for Anabaptist readers to become "insiders" in terms of discourse on racial relations.

The material presented here suggests that if these papers encouraged readers to be concerned for their "black brother," they nevertheless also influenced readers to identify with a dominant white society. With the readers' "white" racial identity assumed, these papers permitted Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren in Christ readers to distance themselves from their Black neighbors, characterizing them in ways that reinforced racial stereotypes and that may have contributed to their suffering.

Following Hubert Brown, cited at the outset of this article, if we Mennonites are to make any progress in racial relations today, we must make an honest appraisal of our past. We must recognize and attend to "the ways in

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[67] Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017).

which we are privileged by our whiteness," at the same time acknowledging that "there is no easy answer, only a path of discernment and faith."[68]

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[68] Ben Goossen, "Mennonite Privilege," *The Mennonite,* March 9, 2017. https://themennonite.org/feature/mennonite-privilege/, accessed January 24, 2019.

Pathways to Engaging Cultural Diversity by Canadian Mennonite Congregations

Rich Janzen

Abstract

In this article, I explore two deliberate pathways that Canadian Mennonite congregations have taken when actively engaging the increasing cultural diversity around them. Based on three case studies of my own narrative research, these pathways include undergoing organizational change (an internally focused pathway), and creating new community settings (an externally focused pathway). At the heart of these pathways is creative intentionality. I conclude by offering five reflections that combined emphasize that these pathways are but first steps on a longer journey of solidarity with culturally diverse newcomers arriving from diverse world regions.

Introduction

In the space of one generation the composition of Canadian society has changed significantly. The adoption of an immigration point-system in the 1960s and subsequent policy changes, including sustained high levels of immigration, have profoundly altered the face of Canadian society. The majority of immigrants now do not come from traditional western and northern European source countries but from more than 200 countries, especially within Asia.[1] The impact of this policy shift has been a rapid growth of linguistic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, most notably in Canada's largest cities[2] but increasingly in smaller centers that have become active in

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[1] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2017*. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration-2017.html.

[2] D. Hiebert, "*Ethnocultural minority enclaves in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver,*" IRPP Study 52 (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2015). http://irpp.org/research-studies/ethnocultural-minority-enclaves-in-montreal-toronto-and-vancouver/.

recruiting newcomers.[3] This diversity trend is expected only to continue as annual immigration targets are raising, set to reach 340,000 by 2020,[4] the highest level in more than a century.[5] Global demographics suggest that Africa, the Middle East, and Asia will remain major sources of immigrants to Canada for decades to come.[6] This changing demographic has also brought diversity to Canada's churches. Newcomers tend to be more religious than the Canadian-born[7] and often turn to churches and other religious communities for material and spiritual support upon arrival.[8] As a result, many Christian denominations have experienced an increase in ethnic diversity.[9] There has also been a rise in the diversity of ethno-specific newcomer congregations. My research has shown that 70 percent of Christian denominations tangibly support ethno-specific newcomer congregations.[10] Even within Canadian Mennonite denominations diverse newcomer congregations are springing up: Hmong, Chinese, Laotian, Ethiopian, and Persian, to name a few.

In this article I am interested in understanding the experiences of Canadian Mennonite congregations that are intentionally trying to engage with this increasingly diverse society. Rather than describing the state of cultural diversity across the Canadian Mennonite landscape, I will instead explore the deliberate pathways that individual congregations take when actively engaging the diversity around them. This type of engagement is at the

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[3] Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), *Local Immigration Partnerships Handbook*, 2013. http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/index/Local-Immigration-Partnerships-Handbook.pdf.

[4] IRCC, *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2017*.

[5] Statistics Canada, "150 years of immigration in Canada," *Canadian Megatrends*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm.

[6] *United Nations World Population Prospects: Key Findings and Advanced Tables* (2015). http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key_Findings_WPP_2015.pdf.

[7] J. Hiemstra and K. Stiller, "Religious affiliation and attendance in Canada," *In Trust Magazine,* 2016. http://www.intrust.org/Magazine/Issues/New-Year-2016/Religious-affiliation-and-attendance-in-Canada.

[8] Angus Reid, *Faith and Immigration: New Canadians rely on religious communities for material, spiritual support* (2018). http://angusreid.org/faith-canada-immigration.

[9] P. Bramadat and D. Seljak, eds., *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2018).

[10] R. Janzen, S. van de Hoef, A. Stobbe, A. Carr, J. Harris, R.A. Kuipers, and H. Acero Ferrer, "Just faith?: A national survey connecting faith and justice within the Christian Reformed Church," *Review of Religious Research* 58 (2016): 229-47. *DOI:* 10.1007/s13644-015-0245-y.

ground level, not a lofty theoretical abstraction but a practical and even a daily decision being lived out. I should mention that the notion of congregations seeking to interact with Canada's growing cultural diversity is hardly unique to the Anabaptist family. It is not a distinctively Mennonite story.

My interdenominational research has found an increasing awareness and a growing desire among churches to actively welcome and respond to the diversity that comes with the arrival of recent immigrants and refugees.[11] Motivations for engagement are typically grounded in a desire to follow biblical imperatives such as "welcoming the stranger" and "loving our neighbor," and in so doing deepen an understanding of God and of one another.[12] However, in this article I will focus mostly on Mennonites. As a Community Psychologist, I will reflect on how these pathways to engaging diversity are linked to transformational community change. As a Christian, I hope that some insight may emerge on what it means to be a faithful church in today's multicultural Canada. Included among readers of this article may be congregants (Mennonite or otherwise) on the "receiving pole" of the two poles of the global migration circuit.[13] That is, they are established within their homeland and coming into contact with diverse newcomers searching to find place, meaning, and support in a new place.[14] This group could comprise congregants who possess a growing recognition of being from a dominant culture relative to newcomers, and are seeking intercultural exchange that is reciprocal and attuned to asymmetrical power relationships.

Perspective
It could be argued that I am entirely the wrong person to write about cultural diversity among Mennonites in Canada. My family lineage is Mennonite on

[11] R. Janzen, A. Stobbe, M. Chapman, and J. Watson, "Canadian Christian churches as partners in immigrant settlement and integration," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies 2016. DOI*: 10.1080/15562948.2015.1123792.

[12] The United Church of Canada. *Vision for becoming an intercultural church*. https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/vision-becoming-intercultural-church. 2019.

[13] A.M. Brazal and E.S. de Guzman, The Intercultural Church: Bridge of Solidarity in the Migration Context, Borderless Press, 2015.

[14] R. Loewen and G. Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2009).

all sides for generations. My upbringing was one of sheltered Mennonite uniformity. In the 1970s I grew up in a Mennonite Brethren (hereafter "MB") church in Ontario in which most people had recently arrived from Mennonite colonies in Paraguay and Brazil, sprinkled with a few directly from the former Soviet Union. The German language dominated (High German in the pulpit, Low German in the foyer), even if the church was bilingual. We had two sets of identical hymnals, English and German, and each Sunday we had two sermons—the German one usually longer. If you sang in the choir, as I was given the impression one should, you needed a working knowledge of Gothic script. It was a generous church in many ways, but at that time it did not do well in engaging people from diverse backgrounds. Very few members did not share in the common Russian Mennonite heritage. This may not be surprising, given that beyond language, cultural practices were also nurtured and expected. It was a tight group where most people had relatives in the church or at least knew their place within a social network in which families were befriended for a long time, even over generations and across oceans.

I suspect that my church was not so different from many other ethno-specific newcomer congregations in Canada's settler history. From the early French Catholics, English Anglicans, Scottish Presbyterians, and German Lutherans, to the later Dutch Reformed, Chinese Alliance, Filipino Catholics, and many others, the ethno-specific newcomer congregation has been a prominent fixture across the Canadian religious landscape. And for good reason. These congregations have acted not only as a *spiritual* center providing newcomers of similar background with meaning and hope in the company of co-religionists, but also as a *community* center providing material support and social connections to aid the transition into a new homeland.[15]

Thirty years later, at the start of the new millennium, I found myself in a very different place. Then, as an adult, I belonged to a church that had little similarity with the ethnic homogeneity of the church of my youth. Still MB, not many people had traditional Russian Mennonite last names, none among the various pastors who served there. I suspect that many in the church did not know much about Mennonite history, or were even aware they were

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[15] D. Ley, "The immigrant church as an urban service hub," *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10 (2008): 2057-74.

attending a "Mennonite" church. Instead, the church seemed more intent in reaching out to the neighbors who lived in the surrounding community. Those people were very diverse, belonging to a gateway neighborhood of newcomers from around the world.

How did this shift in congregational cultural make-up come to be? What had occurred so that the church in my adulthood became so much more culturally diverse than the church of my youth? One explanation could be the broader demographic shift within Canadian society that I mentioned above. While Canadian society has indeed diversified its cultural make-up, and this undoubtedly has gradually influenced the composition of Mennonite congregations, there is another explanation as to why some Canadian Mennonite congregations are more culturally diverse than others. This explanation has to do with intentionality, which is what I explore below, namely the deliberate pathways that congregations take when actively engaging the cultural diversity growing around them.

Sources of Insight and Methodology

This article is based primarily on my dissertation's narrative research about three Mennonite Brethren congregations.[16] Each of these churches in their own way tried to intentionally and creatively engage the ethnic, racial, and religious diversity around them. They were chosen for study in consultation with denominational leaders and thought to be exemplars of how congregations could go about engaging culturally diverse neighbors. My research included the triangulation of four methods within each site (participant observation, focus groups, key informant interviews, document review) that each considered three main research questions related to the process, outcomes, and future directions of multicultural church outreach. In total, 34 church leaders and community partners were involved in qualitative focus groups and key informant interviews, with participant observation conducted at 15 events across the three sites. It constituted one component of a larger evaluation of a national program to equip congregational outreach

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[16] R. Janzen, "Reaching out to multicultural neighbours: Stories that evaluate and encourage innovative church outreach." Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2011. The study was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and approved by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University.

operated by the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.[17]

Secondarily, this article draws on my subsequent research beyond the Mennonite community that provides a fuller context to the dynamics of multicultural church outreach across Canada. These sources include inter-denominational studies on the congregational integration of diverse newcomers, the role of churches in immigrant settlement and integration, research on partnerships between faith groups and newcomer settlement organizations, and research about the link between justice and Christian faith.[18] In addition to this national empirical insight, I also draw on my own experience as a lay leader in a MB church that had active ministry in a multicultural neighborhood of Kitchener, Ontario.

I begin by briefly introducing the outreach stories of the three MB church congregations as I met them in 2010.[19] Next, I discuss two general pathways by which these congregations have attempted to engage with their diverse neighbors, pathways which cut across the three church stories. I end with critical reflections that highlight five key observations related to congregational engagement of cultural diversity. As a community-based researcher committed to promoting transformational community practice, I include implications for future action. Throughout, I link the learnings gleaned from the three stories to a broader literature, including my research with other faith groups, as well as to social systems change theory.

Three Churches

The three churches were located in Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Toronto. All three congregations began their journey into diversity engagement with established and dominant status relative to their newcomer neighbors. Their starting points included Russian Mennonite heritage (Vancouver); Canadian-born Francophone (Winnipeg); Canadian-born from various established denominational traditions (Toronto). All three congregations desired to reach out to the growing number of people in their surrounding

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[17] R. Janzen and D. Wiebe, "Putting God in the logic model: Developing a national framework for the evaluation of faith-based organizations," *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 25, no. 1 (2010): 1-26.

[18] See www.communitybasedresearch.ca for more information about these projects funded by SSHRC and World Vision.

[19] Fuller versions of these stories are presented in my dissertation (see note 16).

neighborhood who did not necessarily share in their cultural norms or ways of knowing.

Vancouver   The first church was South Hill Church, built in 1944 as Vancouver Mennonite Brethren Church. It was the first of many German-speaking Mennonite churches to dominate South Vancouver. In response to changing community demographics, the church underwent a major transformation in 2007. It was then that the remnant of a dwindling German-speaking congregation merged with the English-speaking portion of a MB Chinese church called Pacific Grace, with its Japanese-background pastor. Re-birthed and re-named, the church adopted a vision of becoming a multi-ethnic church determined to reach out to its multicultural neighborhood. For example, it started to run English language classes, hold a pre-school play group, stage international dinners and canning events, and actively participate in the annual community festival. This church's main storyline can be summarized as *Proactive congregational change that responded to changing community demographics.*

Winnipeg   Next is Église Communautaire de la Rivière Rouge (ECRR), a French-speaking congregation located in the heart of Saint-Boniface, the historic French quarter of Winnipeg. The ECRR story began in 1998 as a small Bible study for white francophones. By 2007, the church had its own building and came into contact with the growing numbers of French-speaking immigrants arriving in the city. Helping immigrants to settle in Canada was not something the church had originally planned on doing. Still, church members began to informally respond to the practical settlement needs of newcomers whom they befriended. They established a clothing exchange, bought a van for transportation, engaged newcomer youth in range of activities, started African worship services, and involved newcomers in positions of leadership, including as volunteer pastors. In a matter of months, the size and nature of this church was transformed with newcomers (mostly from West Africa and Haiti) becoming increasingly involved in the church. The church's main storyline could be summarized as *Being open to build relationships with whomever comes across your path.*

Toronto   The third congregation is 614 St. Jamestown in downtown Toronto. This church began in 2005 as a part of the Ontario MB conference's inter-denominational outreach to inner-city Toronto. It was located in the

St. James Town neighborhood of 18 high-rise apartments and a small park. Sixty-four percent of residents were immigrants speaking 120 languages from 90 source countries all within a half-square-kilometer. It was one the city's poorest neighborhoods. The church did not have a building but met in various community spaces. Community outreach was at the heart of the church from its beginning. Informal activities included an annual community festival, barbecues in the park, a support group for people struggling with mental health issues, park clean-up, and interactive Saturday evening worship. More formal activities were carried out in collaboration with community partners, including after-school programs, summer camps, and establishing City Hope, a parallel non-profit organization. This church's main storyline could be summarized as *Living among neighbors in such a way that brings hope.*

Two Pathways

While each of these stories is unique, they hold elements in common. Here I want to discuss two interconnected pathways by which congregations can intentionally engage their culturally diverse neighbours: 1) undergoing organizational change, and 2) creating new community settings. These two pathways emerged following narrative analysis of cross-site themes related to the process of community outreach, and were framed through the lens of systems change theory, which views social systems as interconnected and interdependent and sees the health of a system as dependent on developing and accessing resources that facilitate system functioning.[20] From such an ecological perspective, both pathways imply a change of social system.[21] The difference between the two is in the ecological level of concern. The social system of primary concern for organizational change is the congregation. The neighborhood is of primary concern for the creation of community settings.

　　　　While the three congregations may each have favored one pathway

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[20] E. Trickett, "Multiple-level community-based culturally situated interventions and community impact: An ecological perspective," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 34, no. 3/4 (2009): 257-66.

[21] J.G. Kelly, A.M. Ryan, B.E. Altman, and S.P. Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view," in J. Rappaport and E. Seidman, eds., *Handbook for Community Psychology* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000, 133-60).

over the other, it would be inaccurate to pigeonhole each church in any one category. In reality, all pursued some measure of both pathways. Moreover, having two pathways to draw on gave them more flexibility and creativity in engaging with diversity. I will now consider each pathway in turn, using systems change theory as an orienting framework.

Pathway 1: Undergoing Organizational Change
The first pathway is internally focused and involves a congregation deliberately and proactively undergoing organizational change to better position itself to reach out to and impact its community.[22] The underlying assumption is that it is difficult to engage the surrounding community if the congregation does not first work at its own transformative change.[23] Organizational change also has a symbolic goal, in that the change the organization wishes to see in the community is to be mirrored in its own congregation.[24] This pathway is best characterized by the Vancouver church, which went through a formal congregational change process as a precursor to reaching out to its multicultural neighbors.

I have suggested elsewhere that three requirements are needed for church congregations as social systems that wish to adapt to a changing environment and function effectively.[25] The first is to *create vision*. *Vision* provides direction to the kind of organization that is to be desired, and is cast by leaders who forward their opinions, policies, and underlying principles that should guide the organization.[26] Its goal is to challenge existing attitudes,

[22] S.D. Evans, C.E. Hanlin, and I. Prilleltensky, "Blending ameliorative and transformative approaches in human service organizations: A case study," *Journal of Community Psychology* 35, no. 3 (2007): 329-46.

[23] G. Nelson and I. Prilleltensky, *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-being*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[24] P.W. Speer, "People making public policy in California: The PICO California Project." Evaluation report, Vanderbilt University. Human & Organizational Development, Peabody College, 2002.

[25] R. Janzen, M. Chapman, and J. Watson, "Integrating immigrants into the life of Canadian urban Christian congregations: Findings from a national survey," *Review of Religious Research* 53, no. 4 (2012): 441-70.

[26] P. Foster Fishman, B. Nowell, and H. Yang, "Putting the system back into systems change: a framework for understanding and changing organizational and community systems," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 39 (2007): 197-215.

beliefs, and policies in such a way that represents a shift in organizational norms.[27] For example, leaders within the Vancouver church continually re-emphasized a new multi-ethnic vision of the congregation, encouraging members to regularly reflect on how their ministries fit within this vision. In Winnipeg, the lead pastors spent considerable time teaching, preaching, and role modeling an expanded vision of the church that was now to embrace francophone newcomers from Africa and Haiti.

The second requirement is to create social structures that connect people to each other and the resources that they need.[28] Organizational change thus seeks to break down old settings and events that are exclusionary and deny access to valued resources.[29] Structural change encourages innovation to the extent that new organizational structures facilitate new interactions. For example, the Vancouver church renovated the exterior of its building to signal its transition from a setting for German-speaking people into one in which all community members are welcome. Inside the sanctuary, the church discarded symbols long identified with German-speaking Mennonite ritual (e.g., hymnals in the pew, German scripture verses). This indicated a new openness for diverse others to join in and shape the ritual of worship. In Toronto, church leaders developed new and creative structures to generate funds once the original financial support had ended.

The third requirement is to create social processes that promote engagement and enable people to influence the organization itself.[30] Adaptive organizations meaningfully involve people in decision-making and other aspects of organizational life.[31] Leadership development, planning, training, and evaluation are common processes in organizational change.[32]

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[27] P.Y.T. Sun and J. Scott, "Sustaining second-order change initiation: Structured complexity and interface management," *Journal of Management Development* 10 (2005): 879-95.

[28] Kelly, Ryan, Altman, and Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view."

[29] G. Nelson, J. Ochocka, J. Lord, and K. Griffin, "Nothing about me without me. Participatory action research with self-help/mutual aid organizations for psychiatric consumer/survivors," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 26 (1998): 881-912.

[30] Kelly, Ryan, Altman, and Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view."

[31] Nelson and Prilleltensky, *Community* Psychology: *In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-Being.*

[32] Janzen, Chapman, and Watson, "Integrating immigrants into the life of Canadian urban Christian congregations," 441-70.

For example, in Vancouver a joint planning task group was established that allowed members from the two former congregations (German-speaking and Chinese) to jointly determine the nature of their newly-created congregation. In Winnipeg, newcomers were given the opportunity to assume leadership positions, such as preaching in worship services, joining the Leadership Board, or leading the integration of other newcomers within their church.

To summarize, organizational change is one pathway for congregations to better engage the cultural diversity surrounding them. There are many aspects of changes in vision, structure, process that congregations can reflect on and pursue in order to better welcome and integrate culturally diverse people.[33] Such a three-pronged, holistic approach to congregational change expands existing multicultural church literature (largely from the United States) that typically focuses on singular and narrow aspects of change, such as in cultural awareness or in worship ritual.[34] In short, the three narratives demonstrate that congregations must comprehensively adapt their organizations if they wish to begin to engage their culturally-diverse neighbors in a reciprocally meaningful way.

Pathway 2: Creating New Community Settings
The second pathway to engaging diversity is externally focused and involves creating new community settings, local "places and spaces" that build a sense of community and nurture well-being.[35] They do this by enabling people to connect to resources ("life-giving nutrients") that help them to function better.[36] For example, these settings increase social networks and become

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[33] Ibid.

[34] G. Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012); J. Nieman and T. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-cultural Strategies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2001); D. Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader: Developing a Catholic Personality* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2005). G.A.Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multi-racial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003).

[35] J. Hill, "A rationale for the integration of spirituality into community psychology," *Journal of Community Psychology* 28, no. 2 (2000): 139-49.

[36] Kelly, Ryan, Altman, and Stelzner, "Understanding and changing social systems: An ecological view."

meaningful when they set into motion a sequence of social interactions.[37] Social settings become innovative when they help to fill gaps of interaction within a particular social system. The agenda for creating new community settings is not prescribed but emerges as church members live among their neighbors and identify what is needed. In more theological language, this pathway sets out to bring community transformation by incarnating the presence of God within the neighborhood.

The three church stories are full of examples of new settings being created. The Winnipeg and Toronto churches in particular demonstrated a high capacity to develop these settings in response to perceived community need. It was a reactive approach, in that the need for new social settings was identified through personal relationships. These relationships were typically informal, developed as a function of living side-by-side among their neighbors. While some call on churches to conduct formal, positivistic needs and resource assessment as a part of community engagement,[38] the narratives demonstrate a more informal, naturalistic approach to such assessment.

Some of the new settings were located within the church's own building. In both Vancouver and Winnipeg, for example, the church building became used for various community activities bringing diverse people together (a parent and child play group, English language classes, and a clothing exchange, to name only a few). Housing these activities within the church caused it to become recognized as a "community center" for its respective neighborhood.[39] However, many other settings were located outside its building (whether led by the church or other community groups). In Toronto, where the church did not have its own building, ordinary places such as a coffee shop, a park, an apartment building basement, or an office of a community organization were transformed into spaces where community members and churchgoers intermingled and even worshiped together.

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[37] J.G. Kelly, *On Becoming Ecological: An Expedition into Community Psychology* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

[38] J. Westgate, "The challenge of being a community church in a commuter society," in *Out of the Strange Silence: The Challenge of Being Christian in the 21st Century*, ed. B. Thiessen (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 2005).

[39] D. Ley, "The immigrant church as an urban service hub," *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10 (2008): 2057-74.

Whether settings are formal or informal, church-led or partner-led, those most likely to positively impact neighbors display some common characteristics. I will highlight two inter-related characteristics that seem particularly important within a multicultural context. The first is the fostering of an environment that allows participants to appreciate the uniqueness of diverse individuals. Settings that engage culturally diverse people encourage participants to be deliberately open to the newness that others bring and willing to be enriched by them.[40] Such settings seek to traverse traditional boundaries of history, culture, and power that have kept people separate.[41] Within the church stories this characteristic was often emphasized in discussions about vision and guiding values (e.g., respect, empathy, listening and cultural humility). Indeed, many church members were willing to "let go" of personal preferences and to "put on" the preferences of others.[42] In this way, they demonstrated that while the interactions might be risky with outcomes undetermined, a genuine act of relationship-building cannot leave either party completely unchanged.[43]

In each of the three churches, many examples were shared of how people who previously had not interacted were changed and enriched because of relationships made within these newly created community settings. In some cases, these settings were the gateway for people who previously did not attend church (or had not yet found a home church in Canada) to find a new social network and new spiritual home, and to become active in other church activities including worship services. Some participants made first-time decisions to become Christians through relationships made within these settings. However, despite good intentions, church members did not always express an appreciation of the uniqueness of individuals. In one negative example, a leader confessed how he had inappropriately rushed people towards making "a decision for Christ" at an outreach gathering. He

[40] M. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1966).

[41] K. M. Peters, "Interculturalism: A preferred praxis of ministry in multicultural settings." Doctoral diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009.

[42] G. Parrett, "Becoming a culturally sensitive minister," in *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*, eds. E. Conde-Frazier, S.S. Kang and G.A. Parrett (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 121-50.

[43] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace.*

recognized in hindsight that his actions might well have jeopardized the relationships his church members were building with community members. According to Volf's "drama of the embrace,"[44] the leader had foregone the "opening arms" and "waiting" steps of relationship. In these steps, the church member signals their invitation to relationship by creating space for others to express themselves and ask questions, and by waiting for others to determine the relational pace.[45] According to Volf, relationships slip into the violence of exclusion and oppressive domination when people fail to reconfigure themselves and their identities to make space for other people. Rather, they "seek to reshape the other into who I want her to be in order that in relation to her I may be how I want to be."[46]

The second key characteristic in making a positive impact within multicultural settings is the fostering of an environment that allows participants to appreciate the common humanity of diverse individuals. Rather than focusing on the particular individual, here the emphasis is on what is universally shared. Settings that embody this characteristic allow participants to sense that together they constitute a part of a greater whole. Participants have a sense of belonging, not only because of proximity but shared experience and meaningful purpose.[47] Stressing commonality enables these settings to minimize differences in status and culture, as interactions are designed to be mutually beneficial and reciprocal.[48]

The involvement of African newcomer youth in the Winnipeg church is a good example. This church became a setting with which these youth keenly identified. They were active in leading singing during worship services and afterwards tossing around a football with others on the church parking lot. The youth leader took them to "normal Canadian-places" (e.g., a

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[44] Ibid., 140.

[45] T. Keller, *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

[46] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 91.

[47] P.R. Dokecki, R.T. O'Gorman, and J.R. Newbrough, "Toward a community-oriented action research framework for spirituality: Community psychological and theological perspectives," *Journal of Community Psychology* 29 (2001): 497-518.

[48] G.V. Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation's Introduction to Missional Living* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008). R. Janzen, J. Ochocka, N. Jacobson, S. Maiter, L. Simich, A. Westhues, A. Fleras, and The Taking Culture Seriously Partners, "Synthesizing culture and power in community mental health: An emerging framework," *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 29, no. 1 (2010): 51-67.

shopping mall, a beach, a football field) that acted as settings to connect them with other Canadian-born youth. The message was that in these community places all youth belonged because they all had a common need to belong.

Five Reflections

Below I offer five reflections about congregations that are intentionally engaging with Canada's growing cultural diversity. These reflections are grounded in the three church stories and the two pathways discussed above, but they extend further by drawing on my subsequent interdenominational research. While the reflections describe the current situation, they also look to the future, including suggestions for future practice within Canadian Mennonite congregations.

First, congregations that work intentionally and comprehensively to engage cultural diversity are not so common. While Canadian congregations may be making some efforts to reach out to the diversity around them, these efforts are typically not as comprehensive as those found in the three church stories. In a national survey of 355 congregations from a range of denominations, Canadian congregations were found to be more active in casting vision than in making actual structural and process changes designed to integrate diverse newcomers into their congregational life.[49] Canadian congregations seem to be thinking about engaging diversity more than doing it (or as one survey respondent put it: "our practices have not yet caught up to our values"). I experienced this reality as I worked with MB denominational leaders to identify congregations for study. Congregations were to be selected by "maximal sampling," a term social scientists use when choosing intensity-rich exemplars of the topic under study. In total, five of the approximately 250 MB churches nationwide were identified as potential case studies. The three stories that were eventually selected, therefore, do not claim to be normative of the Canadian Mennonite experience. Rather, these congregations were ahead of the curve in experimenting with how to reach out to their community's cultural diversity. So rather than giving breadth of insight across the Mennonite spectrum today, these stories give depth of insight into possible trajectories for tomorrow.

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[49] Janzen, Chapman, and Watson, "Integrating immigrants into the life of Canadian urban Christian congregations," 441-70.

Second, congregational engagement of cultural diversity is hard work. Dealing with cultural difference can be challenging, especially without the benefit of ample role modeling from previous generations. A national survey of Canadian churches identified what congregational leaders saw as hindering their churches from responding to the diversity around them.[50] At the top of the list was a resistance to adaptation and change, with congregants preferring to be "inflexible and culturally unaware," "ethno-centric," and wanting "newcomers to be like us." Even congregations that had begun to intentionally engage diversity still experienced many challenges, including: 1) the effort required to overcome language barriers and negotiate differing assumptions in such areas as leadership style, theology, worship practices, and expectations of pastoral care; 2) the resources and know-how needed to respond to the many practical settlement needs of newcomers; and 3) a willingness to move beyond the shallow relationship of an initial welcome toward reciprocally living life together. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that I have since learned that all three Mennonite churches participating in my dissertation research have either closed their doors or have changed significantly. My own church recently closed and folded its community ministry into a larger church to ensure that the hard work of engaging diverse newcomers would continue. Nevertheless, I do not view these stories as failures. Rather, I see the churches as trailblazing outliers, what Nelson would call "borderland churches"[51] that do innovative work on the edges (or borders) of what is familiar and safe. Their stories offer two flexible pathways that challenge people to be creative within their own unique context. We need to hear more of these kinds of stories. Their trial-and-error aspect offers insight and inspiration for deciding to take risks toward the direction of diversity.

Third, congregations that intentionally engage cultural diversity require equipping as they respond to God's call. Key leaders in each of the three churches spoke of a very clear (sometimes dramatic) calling from God to lead their churches into engaging the diverse people around them. This is not to suggest that all Mennonite congregations will receive a similar calling (or if they do, not necessarily to engage with such high levels of diversity).

[50] Ibid.
[51] Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation's Introduction to Missional Living.*

But the changing demographics of Canadian communities imply that congregations that see their calling as including community transformation will need to engage with increasingly diverse neighbors. However, many congregations do not appear to be well equipped, nor do they receive adequate support from their denominations. Consider the results of a national survey of leaders from Canada's major denominations,[52] which found that while many churches do have some active ministry directed at diverse newcomers, congregations and denominations were particularly weak in the equipping processes of leadership development, training, planning, and evaluation.

Let me offer here a few suggestions that could benefit Mennonite churches in their multicultural outreach:

- Develop theological underpinnings for multicultural outreach that highlight Anabaptist/Mennonite distinctives;

- Support congregations in discerning God's movement within multicultural communities in recognition that God's spirit is active amidst all of human diversity;

- Build the strategic, leadership, financial, practical and collaborative capacity of congregations in adapting to their multicultural context;

- Share stories about learnings in multicultural outreach across churches.[53]

Fourth, congregations that effectively engage cultural diversity recognize a relational niche. Each year the Canadian federal government invests over 1 billion dollars helping diverse newcomers settle and integrate into our communities.[54] These resources primarily fund non-profit organizations to provide formal settlement services primarily for language, employment, and settlement orientation. Indeed, over the past 30 years a new

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[52] Janzen et al., "Just faith? A national survey connecting faith and justice within the Christian Reformed Church."

[53] I discuss these suggestions at length in Janzen, "Reaching out to multicultural neighbours." See footnote 16.

[54] IRCC Departmental Plan 2017-2018. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/departmental-plan-2017-2018/departmental-plan.html.

settlement profession has emerged in Canada, with settlement professionals now able to earn a graduate degree in immigrant settlement. A recurring theme in my research is the value of churches as complementary partners within a highly professionalized settlement sector,[55] and how churches fill gaps left by other service providers.[56] In particular, this research suggests that churches offer something that professional services lack. While interaction with those services is unidirectional ("you have need, I offer support"), what is missing is the mutuality, the give-and-take of relationships, that makes people feel that they belong and can also contribute. Congregations, including Mennonite congregations, can step into this "relational niche" within their community as they rediscover the deeply relational aspect of their Christian faith.[57] The three stories with their two pathways provide considerable evidence that doing so makes efforts holistic and impactful at the individual, congregational, and community levels.[58]

Fifth, congregations that engage cultural diversity require both acts of charity and the pursuit of justice. There is an important difference between charity and justice.[59] Charitable work begins with the individual and moves to the collective, while justice work begins with the collective before coming down to impact the individual. Charity is the giving of ourselves, of our resources, to individuals in need. Many charitable acts were expressed in the three stories by established church members and newcomers alike: sharing clothing, food, vehicles, new expressions of worship, a word from God, to name a few. If we allow these individual charitable acts to happen with scale, over and over again, we begin to see the aggregate impact on congregations,

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[55] R. Janzen, A. Stobbe, F. Dejean, and J. Ochocka, "The role of churches in immigrant settlement." *Canadian Diversity/ Diversité Canadienne* (CDC) Partnering for Settlement Success: Facilitating Integration and Inclusion. An Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) publication, 2015.

[56] S. Reimer, M. Chapman, R. Janzen, J. Watson, and M. Wilkinson, "Christian churches and immigrant support in Canada: An organizational ecology perspective," *Review of Religious Research* (2016). *DOI*: 10.1080/15562948.2015.1123792

[57] Janzen, Dildar, and Araujo, "Beyond the welcome: Churches responding to the immigrant reality in Canada"; Janzen et al., "Canadian Christian churches as partners."

[58] Janzen, "Reaching out to multicultural neighbours."

[59] See Janzen et al., "Just faith? A national survey connecting faith and justice within the Christian Reformed Church"; N. Wolterstoff, "Justice, not charity: Social work through the eyes of faith," *Social Work and Christianity* 33, no. 2 (2006), 123-40.

neighborhoods, and cities.

However, charity is not enough, especially when relationships are asymmetrical (as many are) including those within multicultural contexts. Doing justice is also needed. Justice—particularly distributive, restorative, and procedural justice—alters how people as a group relate with each other. As the structures and processes facilitating their relations are changed so that they have fair and equitable access to needed resources, relationships can be restored and renewed where individuals can flourish. One striking example from the church stories was how leaders made deliberate efforts to allow new, diverse leadership to arise within their congregations. Creating space for new leaders to express their giftedness had the added effect of drawing in other newcomers—enabling them to feel welcome and become active in congregational life. Both charity and justice are needed when congregations engage their culturally diverse neighbors. While the hard work of charity is giving away our resources to others, the hard work of justice is giving way our position and status so there is room for others to belong and thrive. Giving away in charity, giving way in justice: in both cases we stop clinging to what we see as ours.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s Canadian Mennonite churches have found themselves in the context of increasing cultural diversity fuelled by federal immigration policies favoring newcomers from diverse world regions. Projected demographic and policy trends suggest that the diversification of Canadian society has not yet peaked. The ongoing response of Mennonite churches to it is therefore not limited to congregants of the present generation but will likely to gain prominence in the foreseeable future.

I have outlined two general pathways by which congregations can engage with their culturally diverse neighbors. Whether undergoing congregational change or creating new community settings, at the heart of these pathways is creative intentionality. The underlying assumption is that society's shift towards rising diversity means that churches must be deliberate in discerning new and relevant ways to relate with their neighbors. In this they are not alone but rather are seeking to be in step with, and empowered by, the creative movement of God. I recognize that not all

within the Canadian Mennonite family adhere to a missiology in which local community outreach and transformation are core to the mission of their church. But for those that do, the challenge (and blessing) of faithful living may well rest on this journey of engaging diversity with intentionality and creativity.

The three stories of MB congregations saw this journey as their priority act of collective obedience. They would acknowledge that their efforts were not always effective nor their experiences always easy. Indeed, I was struck with the frequent struggle and loss that their multicultural outreach implied. In particular, I observed the humility and sacrifice of leaders who challenged congregants to stop clinging to the familiar. As churches long recognized for pursuing justice and charitable acts of service, Mennonite congregations generally have the benefit of exploring how to apply this heritage when engaging cultural diversity. But as with the three stories, this can come with a cost. It may cost the giving up of familiar ways of conducting church and of a historical sense of identity. It may cost the giving of time, talent, and treasure in service of others. And it may lead to traditional hierarchies of power being inverted, not merely leveled.

So, perhaps there is a place in this conversation about cultural diversity after all for people raised in Mennonite newcomer congregations as I was. Many can remember the migration experiences of our foreparents as a "dangerous memory" that makes demands on us today. These memories challenge us to be one with the relocation sufferings and hopes of our forebears in "backward-looking solidarity" while walking in "forward-looking solidarity" with migrants who are our new neighbors today.[60] The stories presented in this article provide insight into what first steps on the longer journey of solidarity might look like as we intentionally engage with our culturally diverse neighbors.

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[60] Brazal and De Guzman, *The Intercultural Church: Bridge of Solidarity in the Migration Context*, 4.

What's in a Narrative? Canadian Mennonite Brethren and the Struggle for Identity

Brian Cooper

Abstract

Canadian Mennonite Brethren are experiencing a crisis of denominational identity rooted in longstanding neglect of a contextual theology that could forge a common self-understanding. The basis of theological agreement has long been assumed, centered more on simple biblicism than on explicit theological consensus. Connections based on ethnicity, socio-cultural relations, and institutional affiliation are proving insufficient to be the ground of agreement, and movements such as New Calvinism are challenging traditional articulations of theological identity. As a result, intentional contextual theological work is necessary to create denominational cohesion.

Introduction[1]

The question of what it means to be Mennonite Brethren continues to stimulate conversation, but agreement is elusive. Doug Heidebrecht notes the persistence of challenges that not only work against theological attempts to articulate common identity but weaken "the relational 'glue' that enables individual churches to feel like [they] belong to a larger group."[2] While MBs have stressed the need for biblical theology, and have prized the work of leaders and scholars who exercised great skill in reading biblical texts in their linguistic, literary, and cultural contexts, MB theology has usually overlooked the crucial step of contextualizing the scripture into the readers' own setting.

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[1] This paper is based on a presentation prepared for the 50th Anniversary Conference of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, held in Winnipeg in November 2018 and entitled "A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada since 1970."

[2] Doug Heidebrecht, "Living Our Identity," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, October 3, 2019. https://mbherald.com/living-our-identity/.

I will argue that Canadian Mennonite Brethren (hereafter "MBs") have traded upon socio-cultural and institutional relations rather than develop a clear and commonly practiced theological method, and that this trend has contributed to a growing theological fragmentation with at least two observable results. First, it has produced a loss of denominational cohesion, seen in declining participation in discernment, support for denominational initiatives, and levels of financial subscription. Lacking a common self-identity, MBs have fragmented, theologically and regionally, making cooperation difficult. Second, the lack of a common theological platform has allowed groups with different agendas to advance new theological narratives as foundational to MB identity.

At the outset, let me briefly clarify the terminology I will be using. By "theological method" I mean a *process* informing theological reflection that employs a commonly accepted set of hermeneutical principles by which to contextualize a reading of biblical texts into a particular community of faith. Thus I use "contextual theology" as a synonym for this term. By "theological platform" I mean a *product*, a set of theological commitments that arises from the process.

The question of a denomination's theological identity is generally a murky one, and the diversity of theological views among Canadian Mennonites illustrates the complexity of evaluating the interplay of sociological and ideological dynamics. "Identity" is itself a problematic term, pointing to a presumably objective standard imposed on members of a group who are generally more diverse than is acknowledged by an outside observer. In contrast, I will focus on identity understood as an internally generated indicator of unity around a broadly accepted set of theological priorities.[3] These priorities arise from a narrative that provides both historical definition and theological cohesion. In looking at MBs as a sample group within the larger Canadian Mennonite community, I will mainly examine attempts to

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[3] Identity has been a recurring theme in works produced within the MB community. Consider these articles in *Direction*, the MB theological journal: Delbert L. Wiens, "Immersion and the Mennonite Brethren Identity Crisis," *Direction* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 14-25; Paul Toews, "Two Moments in the Search for a Mennonite Brethren Identity," *Direction* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 18-30. See also Abe J. Dueck, Bruce L. Guenther, and Doug Heidebrecht, eds., *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections After 150 Years* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 2011).

derive a common identity.

Lack of a common identity has contributed to the rise of new theological impulses among Canadian MBs. For example, neo-Reformed theology (also known as New Calvinism)[4] has risen to prominence in the past 10-15 years as representing, in the eyes of its champions, the hallmark of theological orthodoxy and especially the authority of Scripture. Its proponents have also sometimes claimed that it represents a purer form of faithful MB theology than that of most MBs.[5] In the absence of a commonly accepted theological method that could be used to reply, MBs have had difficulty answering this charge. In fact, MB theology has long associated identity with simple imitation of New Testament practice (discipleship, peace and nonresistance, and mutual relief, among others).[6] The doctrines necessary to resource this imitation receive less attention and can appear to be of secondary importance. MB self-expression has not used a clear contextual method to inform ethical commitments. As more than one historian has noted, MBs "have never had a solid theological rudder to steer their theological ship."[7] This has allowed multiple narratives to vie for defining MB identity.

Mennonite Brethren Origins and the Problem of Identity

MB origins were primarily oriented around a desire for a reinvigorated spirituality, and only secondarily—and latterly—by a desire to create a methodological and doctrinal foundation to support a newfound focus on spiritual rebirth.[8] The group that separated itself from the larger Mennonite

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[4] This topic was the focus of an entire issue of *Direction*. See "The New Calvinism Considered," *Direction* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2013).

[5] John Neufeld, "Ploughing with a Donkey and an Ox: On Being Anabaptist and Reformed," in ibid., 130.

[6] *Yearbook of the 63rd Convention of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1973), 9-10.

[7] Abraham Friesen, "Mennonite Brethren Beginnings: Background and Influences," *Renewing Identity in Mission*, 99.

[8] Baptism was the traditional entry point into the church in Mennonite theology. MBs contested the formalism of this practice, insisting that baptism "is not the new birth, as some of the unconverted maintain, but serves as a sign for the baptismal candidate, that he is really born again." New birth would be confirmed at least in part through baptism, but new birth could not be overlooked. See Mennonite Brethren Church, "Document of Secession (Mennonite Brethren Church, 1860)," https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Document_of_

community in Russia did so in the interest of spiritual vitality, but its mission was to win over Mennonite compatriots who were quite literally "family," at least in the biological sense. This phenomenon may partially explain the difficulties inherent in identifying the germ of MB theological identity at its inception, associated variously with a recovery of original Anabaptism, the influence of Pietism, or a shift to evangelicalism.[9] Leaders insisted at the time that they shared the foundational doctrinal convictions of the Mennonite community from which they had separated—but nevertheless insisted on being distinct from them.

In view of this experiential approach to theology, the question of how to create and maintain consensus is apt. Two notable features arise from examing MB conference records. First, for the first century of its existence, the socio-ethnic cohesiveness and insularity[10] of the MB community helped maintain theological unity. Outside theological influences were regarded with caution. Leadership in churches and in the denomination came from within, and Bible schools were established for that purpose. Second, theological direction was centralized in a close-knit, highly respected group, men who served as the denomination's theological leaders—arguably, the arbiters of orthodoxy—although their recommendations were ratified by members gathered in general conference sessions. Later formalized as the Committee for Reference and Counsel, this group responded to theological inquiries, provided documents for strategic and theological implementation, protected against outside influences,[11] and largely provided the answer to

Secession_(Mennonite_Brethren_Church,_1860), accessed March 8, 2019.

[9] For example, Hans Kasdorf, "Reflections on the Church Concept of the Mennonite Brethren," *Direction* 4, no. 3 (July 1975): 339-46. Cf. Friesen, "Mennonite Brethren Beginnings: Background and Influences," 83-102.

[10] MBs did not display a classically sectarian attitude, but they were cautious about close cooperation with Christians from other traditions. For example, a 1943 conference resolution, reaffirmed in 1948, chose not to recognize ordination of ministers coming into the MB conference from other denominations. Even marrying a Christian from another church tradition brought one under scrutiny to see if one's church membership ought to be continued. See A.E. Janzen, ed., *We Recommend: Recommendations and Resolutions of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1878-1963* (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Reference and Counsel of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1964), 53, 124, 157.

[11] *We Recommend*, 219.

the recurring question intended to resolve all theological issues, *Was sagt das Wort*? ("What does Scripture say"?)[12] Theological identity, though not described as such, was taken implicitly to entail application of biblical texts by recognized leaders for practical instruction in faithful Christian living.

When MB leaders began to search for resources to give clarity to the movement, they found common cause more along linguistic and relational lines than along theological ones, cooperating with German-speaking Pietist, *Allianz,*[13] and German Baptist leaders who shared their literalistic biblicist orientation and revivalist sympathies. Their priorities were to find allies who could help by providing resources for training leaders and basic theological definition for the movement. The validity of the content they imbibed was simply assumed, based on a superficially shared commitment to biblical authority and evangelism.

Caught Between Two Narratives: Sectarianism and Evangelism

Because of their discriminating relations with other Christian bodies, whether Mennonite or other groups, MBs have been identified as sectarian. They insisted upon maintaining a visible qualitative distinction—based on a voluntary commitment to Christian discipleship—between members of the community and those in the larger social sphere outside it.[14] However, while a sociological study of moving from a purely sectarian posture toward a denominational outlook[15] may describe the phenomenology of the denomination's development, it does not tell the whole story about how MBs viewed themselves. It also fails to address the theological nuances allowing them to be sectarian while engaging aggressively in evangelistic mission.

That MBs were *both* sectarian *and* evangelistic can been seen from the historical evidence, and this apparent paradox is partly related to a lack of clarity about theological method. They did not differentiate between formal

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[12] Ibid., 97.

[13] The *Allianz* was an interdenominational evangelical group in Germany that was related to the Evangelical Alliance in Britain. See Christian Neff, "Evangelical Alliance," http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Evangelical_Alliance, accessed April 10, 2018.

[14] John E. Toews, "Theological Reflections," *Direction* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 63.

[15] The best treatment remains Richard G. Kyle, *From Sect to Denomination: Church Types and Their Implications in Mennonite Brethren History* (Hillsboro, KS: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1985).

norms for discipleship and culturally located material norms developed within their largely segregated and ethnically mono-cultural community during their first century. Richard Kyle notes that "an isolationist mindset and a tendency toward ethical legalism largely held sway in Mennonite Brethren circles until the mid-twentieth century in the United States and perhaps a decade longer in Canada."[16]

Despite this, evangelistic fervor compelled MBs to retain some degree of relationship to other groups and especially to other Mennonites. MBs did not secede from the Mennonite community out of a desire to completely dissociate themselves from either other Mennonites[17] or other denominational groups. They maintained friendly relations with those with whom they had contact while keeping the qualitative distinction intact. Their commitment to spreading an evangelical message of spiritual rebirth compelled them to bring the same theological framework they had internalized to replicate the joy of spiritual rebirth in others. But what it did not do was motivate development of a fully-orbed theological system. The emphasis was on evangelism; discipleship would simply follow naturally as people read their Bibles and did what Scripture commanded. Time and migration to settlements in the New World did not dampen instincts to remain largely self-sufficient communities seeking to perpetuate their spiritual vitality into the next generation and to bring the good news to other German-speaking (generally DGR Mennonite[18]) communities.

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[16] Kyle, *From Sect to Denomination*, 109.

[17] The introduction to the 1902 MB Confession of Faith makes it clear that MB sought to clarify, rather than sever, the common commitment to Mennonite theology that they believed they shared with Mennonites: "That which the Mennonite Brethren Church has always maintained is repeated today: our new organization did not dissolve the confessional fellowship with the Mennonite Anabaptist churches in Russia in 1860; the organization of our Brethren Church was a protest against the ecclesiastical practice of the church referred to, especially regarding baptism and church discipline, and continues to this day, despite the heartfelt brotherly fellowship that we enjoy with many of them." See Abe J. Dueck, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity, 1872-1922* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 1997), 109.

[18] "DGR Mennonite" refers to those Mennonites whose ancestry can be traced through the history of Dutch, German, and Russian settlements. Cf. Bruce L. Guenther, "From Isolation and Ethnic Homogeneity to Acculturation and Multi-cultural Diversity: The Mennonite Brethren and Canadian Culture," *Direction* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 138-61.

Canadian MB mission work extended through most of Western Canada by the 1950s. Interestingly, the denomination's multi-tiered approach to mission and church planting was tied not to theological priorities but to geographical locations. Wherever there were Mennonites who needed to be evangelized, mission efforts could lead directly to the planting of MB churches. But where evangelism took place among other groups, whether Canadians of other nationalities or Indigenous peoples, mission work took a different course, because these groups, even if they could be taught to be Christians in the MB way, would retain sufficient residual cultural trappings to make direct denominational relationships impossible.

Converts won in mission work outside Mennonite communities were sisters and brothers in Christ but were nonetheless not immediately suitable to form MB churches. In a 1944 document, a West Coast mission leader stated that non-DGR converts "should be directed to nearby believers' churches. Failing that, as long as the principle of self-determination was not violated, converts should be baptized and formed into *Gemeinschaften* [associations—mission churches, presumably]."[19] Progressing from mission church to full conference church involved a longer process of denominational indoctrination. The implicit expectation was that full church status was reserved for those with appropriate cultural and linguistic (i.e., German-speaking Mennonite) heritage. MB theological identity ignored the formative elements of theology and mission and retreated to the safety of cultural uniformity, because the foundational narrative of what it meant to be MB was still inextricably bound up in the cultural experience of the group.

Internally, MB identity had never been clearly articulated; it was simply assumed, based on common tradition, common language, common practices, and common educational formation. However, by the middle of the 20th century the unifying force of these elements was in significant decline. By the 1960s, German had given way to English as the *lingua franca* of theological education and church worship. As well, geographic dispersal across the large expanse of Canada, and the diversity of cultural contexts across the country, exacerbated the challenge of competing interests.[20]

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[19] Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arm's Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1987), 45.

[20] In the 1990 update to a *Mennonite Encyclopedia* article, Abe J. Dueck noted the

Family or Faith? Theology and Ethnicity as Competing Identities

Because MBs, like other Mennonite groups, have existed not only as a religious community but as a socio-cultural people group for much of their history, they manifest a tension in self-understanding between theological and ethnic factors.[21] This has become an ongoing issue, complicating efforts to discern just what it means to be MB. Theological issues may have precipitated the birth of the denomination, but cultural markers persist, further complicating these efforts.[22]

In the 1970s, J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder noted the persistence of ethnicity in their analysis of four North American Anabaptist denominations, as well as evidence of theological change and cultural assimilation. They concluded that "the message from the 'left wing of the Reformation' [a term used to describe the early Anabaptists] does speak to the contemporary world, but it must be freed from the encrusted cultural forms within which it so easily becomes encased by the passages of time and the generations."[23] They identified elements they associated with historic Anabaptism, but found the level of commitment to such principles inconsistent among the groups they surveyed.[24]

In the 1980s, the question of what it meant to be MB continued. John E. Toews's work painted a grim picture: the forecast for Canadian MBs was only slightly less bleak than for Americans:

> The Profile suggests the Mennonite Brethren Church is at a critical moment in history. The trends identified in the Profile point toward the loss of a particular theological identity in

denominational struggle with "issues of nationalism, regionalism, and fragmentation…," pointing to increasing theological diversity and a loss of denominational identity as important factors. See Abe J. Dueck, "General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches," http://gameo.org/index.php?title=General_Conference_of_Mennonite_Brethren_Churches, accessed April 12, 2018.

[21] As a boy, I had a number of arguments with my mother, who was raised a Bergthaler Mennonite, about whether "Mennonite" referred to religious conviction or ethnicity.

[22] Delbert Wiens, speaking only somewhat facetiously about his MB upbringing, quipped, "I might become an atheist; but, even so, I would be a Mennonite atheist." Delbert L. Wiens, "From the Village to the City," *Direction* 2. no. 4 (Oct. 1973-Jan. 1974): 147.

[23] J. Howard Kaufman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later: A Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1975), 343.

[24] Ibid., 342. The MB denomination was one of the groups surveyed.

popular American cultural religion. The alternative is renewal as an Anabaptist-Mennonite Brethren people. The continued loss of identity will lead to the complete disintegration of the Mennonite Brethren in the United States, and, perhaps, in Canada, although the scores suggest greater coherence of identity and mission in Canada.[25]

Richard Kyle observed that trends among Canadian and American MBs were similar. Differences in the timing of migrations to North America affected the chronology but not the nature of trends affecting identity; the main difference was that trends in Canada developed slightly later than those in the United States.[26]

In a 1987 sociological examination, Peter Hamm opined that "Canadian Mennonite Brethren are presently undergoing a crisis of identity" in the face of secularizing factors.[27] However, his analysis relies largely on sociological rather than theological markers. In 2011, Alfred Neufeld noted that the theology of the original MB leaders was neither original nor distinctive to MBs. Their theological "pillars of Christian identity are not unique: this is exactly what many Mennonite and non-Mennonite Christians also want."[28] The problem of identification remained.

Where and How of Formation: Mennonite Brethren and Theological Education

Although many MBs once preferred to maintain their ethnic cohesiveness, they were now rubbing shoulders with Canadians from various backgrounds. They were also encountering new theological ideas assimilated by leaders who had pursued education outside the MB world. Increasingly, ethnicity and language were acknowledged to be insufficient centripetal forces to sustain denominational identity, and familiar theological commitments were generally not seen as requiring critical reappraisal so much as frequent

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[25] John E. Toews, "Theological Reflections," *Direction* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 68.

[26] Kyle, *From Sect to Denomination*, 109.

[27] Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1987), 226.

[28] Alfred Neufeld, "Recovering Apostolic and Prophetic Origins and Identity," *Renewing Identity and Mission*, 20.

reaffirmation.

The overarching method to preserve and transmit a faithful identity was connected to a simple educational process. Churches would raise up young members to attend MB Bible Schools where they would be taught by MB teachers and train for service in MB churches. Repeating this process indefinitely would assure that the community would survive, even prosper, by maintaining a cycle of spiritual formation for new generations. Cohesiveness was derived largely from the dynamic teaching of conference leaders whose personal theological commitments were often equated with normative theology.[29] Theological fidelity was implicitly expected to be more a product of *where* people learned to read Scripture than of *how* they learned to read it.

Nevertheless, by the 1960s, the changing demographics of Bible School attendance set the stage for greater uncertainty about denominational identity. First, although statistics on those in leadership roles who were Bible school graduates showed that the established formula was holding true, the percentage of church trustees and ordained pastors was significantly lower: "those who managed the finances and property of the Conference and those who filled the pulpits ranked lowest in the scale of those who had attended Bible school."[30] Second, the educational formation of teachers at Bible training institutions was varied. This variation contributed to indiscriminate assimilation of the outside theological ideas previously mentioned. In a 1978 article, Calvin Redekop candidly noted that the theological "soundness" of MB institutions was directly influenced by factors of which members were generally unaware. The predominant theological approach was "largely a matter of personal preference of the seminaries at which the majority of faculty have attended."[31] Increasing theological diversity was creeping into MB institutions without being recognized.

Nothing really set MB schools apart from other schools apart from the name. Leaders taught at schools in Canada, but they had received training in various institutions, bringing back theological models and

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[29] Penner, *No Longer at Arm's Length*, 16-17.

[30] Ibid., 101.

[31] Calvin Redekop, "Future Options for Mennonite Brethren Higher Education," *Direction* 7, no. 4 (October 1978): 15.

methods into their home community. William Bestvater, a graduate of the dispensational-fundamentalist Light and Hope Bible Institute in Cleveland, Ohio, exercised a profound influence on the Canadian schools. He directed the Winnipeg City Mission for eight years and taught for nine years at the MB Bible School in Herbert, Saskatchewan. There, and elsewhere in MB schools, a "dispensationalist hermeneutic was unquestioningly accepted and this became the predominant mode of understanding the Bible."[32] It would remain the accepted theological paradigm for decades and remains an influence, albeit diminished, today.

Renewed Attempts to Articulate Identity: Biblical Theology

In the 1960s, MB leaders, recognizing the pervasive but unacknowledged influence of dispensationalism, shifted the theological orientation of the MB seminary in Fresno, California from the literalism of a predominantly fundamentalist approach to Scripture to one that attempts to allow biblical language and categories to shape a theological system. While this has allowed for a theological approach that integrates biblical studies, theology, and ethics, it has not actually created a theological system to do this integrative work. Rather, the emphasis on biblical theology that has became prominent since the 1970s has perpetuated the notion that Bible teaching—usually the sort of plain and direct interpretation that has long prevailed at a grassroots level—provides all the theological resourcing necessary for a diverse denominational constituency.[33] This emphasis has also enabled deeper and more sophisticated study of biblical texts, but such study has not generally translated into deeper and more sophisticated contextual reflection on the texts, nor has it attempted to equip lay MBs to do theological reflection on their own.

　　Increased levels of theological education among MB leaders have contributed to theological diversity in the past forty years. In seeking higher levels of preparation they naturally came into contact with diverse ideas and institutions.[34] This trend is not to be lamented; indeed, for some time MB

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[32] Abe J. Dueck, "The Changing Role of Biblical/Theological Education in the Mennonite Brethren Church," in A.J. Dueck, H.J. Giesbrecht, and V.G. Shillington, eds., *The Bible and the Church: Essays in Honour of Dr. David Ewert* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1988), 136.

[33] Brian Cooper, "The Theological Poverty of the Mennonite Brethren Vision," *Direction* 47, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 169-83.

[34] Abe J. Dueck traced the educational paths of MB scholars. He found that most had advanced

leaders have regarded such diversity as completely legitimate. More than thirty-five years ago, David Ewert noted the trend toward diversity, then already well established, citing examples to show that "there can be great diversity in a denomination without destroying unity in basic matters of faith and practice."[35] However, largely absent today is an explicit description of a contextual theological method, i.e., how and why MB theological commitments are structured as they are. MB theology has rested largely on a historical review of sociological and phenomenological treatments of theology. What is missing is a rationale for a hermeneutic that can serve an apologetic function and offer a coherent description of the denomination's theological priorities.[36]

Recapturing a Narrative? The Problem of the Anabaptist Vision

In discerning how MB theology can fairly represent a stream of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, the question of what makes teaching authentically Anabaptist-Mennonite is a logical one to raise. In trying to recover a fuller sense of identity, MB leaders found that Harold Bender's "Anabaptist Vision"[37] provided an ideological starting point. His work was familiar to church leaders and scholars, and had been presented to delegates at a centennial celebration in Winnipeg in 1960.[38] Bender's thesis was that a

education from either universities or non-MB theological institutions. See Abe J. Dueck, "The Changing Role of Biblical/Theological Education in the Mennonite Brethren Church," in Dueck, Giesbrecht, and Shillington, *The Bible and the Church*, 145-46. My survey of MB theological educators shows similar diversity. Faculty education has taken place in Canada, the US, and Europe, in both universities and seminaries. Despite their frequent pursuit of advanced education, MBs have not created any advanced level degree programs in denominational institutions.

[35] David Ewert, "Can We Have Diversity with Unity? Unity and Diversity in the Body of Christ," *Direction* 11, no. 3 (July 1982), http://www.directionjournal.org/11/3/can-we-have-diversity-with-unity-unity.html. accessed April 12, 2018.

[36] David Ewert's own work is a notable exception to this trend, although he did not describe his theological approach as distinctly Mennonite Brethren. For example, see David Ewert, "The Unique Character of Christian Ethics," *Direction* 2, no. 3 (July 1973): 66-70.

[37] Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), reprinted as "The Anabaptist Vision (1944)," http://www.anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=The_Anabaptist_Vision_(1944), accessed November 13, 2018.

[38] Abe Dueck, "Canadian Mennonites and the Anabaptist Vision," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (1995): 73.

pure Anabaptism originating with the Swiss Brethren in the 1520s lay behind not only subsequent incarnations of the Radical Reformation but the entire Believers Church movement (of which many Protestant denominations were a part), and informed contemporary views of the separation of church and state, religious toleration, and the development of modern liberal democracy. His rhetoric motivated MB leaders and others to call members to return to the simplicity and nonconformity of early Anabaptist spirituality. The Anabaptist Vision would be a powerful tool to clarify self-understanding and to focus evangelism and service.

However, as compelling as this vision was, major flaws hampered efforts to harness its potential. The first flaw was historiographical. Bender's assumption that Anabaptism sprang from a pure and simple source was shown by later scholarship to be inadequately supported by historical evidence.[39] The shift in 16th-century Anabaptist historiography from "monogenesis" explanations to "polygenesis" explanations provided much fodder for historians, but in the long term it was insufficient for articulating a singular identity. The second flaw was that Bender assumed 16th-century Anabaptism can speak with self-evident immediacy to a 20th-century Anabaptist-Mennonite constituency. For Bender, and for Canadian leaders like John A. Toews whose work to recapture MB identity was influenced by Bender,[40] what was needed was a reappraisal of the presumed founding narrative. Ethical imperatives would be obvious, and matters of contextual theological method superfluous. Further, for his part, Bender considered the MB renewal movement of 1860 a renewal of the Anabaptist Vision of the 16th century.[41] In light of this, it is easy to see why his version of Anabaptist and MB history would have received a favorable reading. Nevertheless, appealing to a preferred version of a founding creation myth has not proven effective for uniting MBs.

It is also worth noting that Bender's Anabaptist Vision, as influential as

[39] James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (January 1975): 83-121.

[40] This list includes several faculty members at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg and a number of leaders in the Canadian MB Conference. Cf. Abe Dueck, "Canadian Mennonites and the Anabaptist Vision," 71-88.

[41] Dueck, "Canadian Mennonites and the Anabaptist Vision," 73.

his apologia for Anabaptist-Mennonite theological orientation has been, is a revisionist reading of the Anabaptist tradition. The Schleitheim Confession of 1527, the guiding document of the Swiss Anabaptist tradition that Bender championed, "has not had a high profile in the North American [MB] confessional tradition," noted Stephen Dintaman.[42] The original confessional influences on MB leaders likely did not come from Schleitheim, and trying to reorient MB theology based on a recovery of the Anabaptist Vision based on it is a dubious enterprise at best. Bender's Anabaptist Vision validated Anabaptist emphases on peacemaking, godliness, and mutual aid (among other things) in a way that renewed awareness of their historical significance. But his view takes a vital spirituality and theological system for granted as a foundation for his ethics, and consequently he says little about theological foundation or method. For MBs struggling to articulate their own vision that would transcend parochial legalism, his strong ethical orientation did not fit. They were not alone in making this observation; Dintaman memorably noted a reductionist focus on ethics in the Anabaptist Vision.[43] As a group that has emphasized spiritual rebirth and adopted a deliberately evangelical-Anabaptist posture, MBs may have a pedigree compatible with Bender's vision. However, it is far less clear that this vision, even as a paradigm for refocusing, provides enough clarity on theological method to orient and guide the denomination.

In the 1970s, a focus on older Anabaptist theological commitments (rather than on newer theologies such as dispensationalism) was seen as integral to creating a renewed identity, and an effort was made to identify influences that detracted from the expression of pure Anabaptism. The 1973 Canadian Conference yearbook notes a resolution presented to delegates concerning MB identity. It laments that "as a result of exposure to various 'winds of doctrine,' and due to the indiscriminate acceptance of views which are contrary to both the New Testament and the Anabaptist Vision, we have in recent years experienced an identity crisis."[44] The teaching of the NT and

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[42] Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith* (Elkhart, IN: Institute for Mennonite Studies, 1985), 27.

[43] Stephen F. Dintaman, "The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 205-208.

[44] *Yearbook, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: The Christian Press, 1973), 9.

the Anabaptist Vision are mentioned so closely together as to suggest that they are nearly synonymous. But the association is more assumed than demonstrated, leading to a perpetuation of the identity problem. Even if the story of the 16th-century Anabaptists is compelling, it is not clear either how it (or the origin of the MB movement in the 19th century) offers a normative representation of biblical teaching, or how such a representation, were it to exist, might appear today.

Nevertheless, the attempt to make a renewed Anabaptism central for MB identity was a long-term priority, and the influence of North American evangelical Christianity on MBs was lamented. In a 1985 article on the denomination's theological climate, John E. Toews observed that "Mennonite Brethren piety looks more popularly evangelical—"save me Lord and make me feel good, but ask little from me"—and less Anabaptist-Mennonite— "empower me Lord to be a disciple-missionary for the Kingdom of God."[45] While the Anabaptist Vision remained a focus for some, it did not provide a theological center of gravity sufficient to attract a majority of MBs. Generally, it seemed far easier for individuals to articulate their uneasiness with trends in spirituality than to identify theological correctives.

Challenge of a New Identity: New Calvinism
In the absence of theological clarity, various proposals have emerged in recent years. The MB theological journal *Direction* devoted an entire issue in 2013 to the question of how neo-Reformed theology, identified as "New Calvinism," has influenced Canadian MBs. A feature article by John Neufeld, former MB pastor and advocate of neo-Reformed theology, argues for the legitimacy of a theological identity that seems foreign to MB origins. The article provocatively states that "Anabaptism as a movement was never intended to stand alone. It is a 'corrective' movement, and no one should take a 'corrective' and make it the central thing."[46] Neufeld is not simply saying that Reformed theology can coexist harmoniously with Anabaptist theology; he insists that MB theology needs Reformed theology to supplement and correct the inadequate foundation of Anabaptism.

The Reformed side of me wants to chastise the Anabaptist by

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[45] Toews, "Theological Reflections," 61-62.
[46] Neufeld, "Ploughing with a Donkey and an Ox," 126.

saying that while you think of the church as the people of God and following Jesus as the calling upon the church, you have not asked how it is that individuals can become the people of God. It is the lack of a clear doctrinal formulation that leads to a church no longer founded on grace, premised instead on human opinion, and led astray by every wind of doctrine. Anabaptism needs the Reformed movement, or it vanishes into the very lifeless morass in which Eduard Wuest found the Russian Mennonite colonies in the 1840s and '50s.[47]

Two features of this article are notable. First, Neufeld's revisionist view of MB history not only gives rise to a competing theology, it challenges the traditional foundational narrative. Neufeld insists that the original MB leaders intentionally melded Reformed soteriology with Pietism in their new amalgam of Anabaptist spirituality.[48] Second, his proposal to repristinate an older theological agenda in line with the 1902 MB Confession of Faith suggests a significant devolution in MB theological integrity in the intervening period. While both his theological and historical assessments are largely without foundation, they nevertheless exemplify the problems arising from the lack of a clearly defined theological method.

Conclusions

Without a commonly accepted theological method, seeking common ground amid diverse contexts and commitments will be increasingly difficult, especially as traditionally strong relational connections are weakening. For example, Canadian MBs have already expressed a sense of disconnect between their local church experience and the Canadian MB Conference. While 76 per cent of respondents in a 2017 survey agreed with the statement "It is important to me that my church is part of the national MB conference," Only 21 per cent agreed with the statement "The national conference understands the needs of my church to effectively support us."[49] The survey results not only indicate that organizational responsiveness is a

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[47] Ibid., 130.
[48] Ibid., 126.
[49] "MB Survey - National and Provincial Conferences," https://www.mennonitebrethren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2017-Survey-Conference.pdf, accessed November 15, 2018.

key concern but also suggest that theological cohesion is the real underlying issue. Organizational cohesiveness should follow theological identity, not the other way round.

Theological disputes are difficult to resolve, because differing approaches cause people to talk past one another. MBs continue tenuously agreeing on theological content, but with some disagreement on baptism and membership, and on love and nonresistance. Despite disagreements on theological method, there is a surprising degree of consensus, as evidenced in conversations about atonement theology in 2010-11. Although there is broad consensus on many issues, it has arisen more incidentally than intentionally, and is largely the residue of past unity. Fears about disagreements on the atonement gave way to an almost sheepish acknowledgment of substantial agreement after the conversations concluded. Lack of a common method meant that there was no ready way to have ongoing conversations that could engender a deeper consensus. In the absence of such conversations, fears of unfavorable theological diversity grew. The exchanges on atonement theology revealed that despite different approaches, there was still a common commitment that some found surprising. Yet there was also more diversity than these discussions displayed, if we consider what was not said at the time and who did not participate in these exchanges.

Theological conversations among Canadian MBs can become fractious. In the case of neo-Reformed theology, the New Calvinism hermeneutic implies that theological work answers a set of predetermined questions in order to demonstrate orthodoxy. This hermeneutic makes Anabaptist formulations in certain areas, e.g., soteriology, biblically unfaithful or even heterodox, because they fail to align with the priorities of the neo-Reformed theological system. But what is not readily acknowledged is that the questions posed in neo-Reformed theology, rather than the answers, significantly contribute to the problem. This occurs because the questions focus heavily on matters of doctrine, often at the expense of discipleship. Put another way, Anabaptist theology has historically not asked the same questions as Reformed theology. Neo-Reformed theology and Anabaptism come from two different contextual theologies. Commitment to having theological conversations—about issues, not about different kinds of theology—can go only part of the way to creating and strengthening denominational identity.

What I have in mind are conversations that shed light on various questions in order to better understand the reasons for diversity. MB commitments to be both "evangelical" and "Anabaptist" will mean little without investigating what these terms mean and how they can coexist.

Appeals to the unifying power of the current 1999 Confession of Faith have been useful for connecting disparate groups within the denomination. But the role and authority of the Confession is eroding; it is now frequently described as an ideal or as an aspirational document rather than a statement of what MBs actually believe together.[50] Further, appeal to a confession rooted in a distant founding narrative will face increasing contextual remoteness from contemporary concerns. The Confession was intended to be reviewed and revised periodically, but a lack of consensus on theological method makes that difficult, even impossible. Theological identity then dissipates for lack of a methodology, even if there is consensus on historical origins.

As is the case with MBs, Canadian Mennonites more broadly appear to be experiencing a theological diversity that strains unity (witness the evolving discussions in Mennonite Church Canada and in provincial Mennonite conferences). With reference to some especially difficult issues, their decision to remain together seems anchored in a commitment not only to process but to a common identity as a peace church, notwithstanding diverse theological convictions.[51] This may prove to be a model for MBs as they look for ways to strengthen ties within the denominational community. Theological educators may have an opportunity to occupy a strategic role in these discussions, and perhaps can learn from the self-articulation of Jewel Gingerich Longenecker of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary regarding difficult conversations (in this case, about sexual expression). "Perhaps membership in Mennonite Church USA should be based, not on our beliefs about sexual ethics," she writes, "but on our willingness to commit to participate in in-depth weekly Bible study in our own congregations."[52]

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[50] This statement comes from the author's personal experience on the Board of Faith and Life of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, and on the Pastoral Ministries Committee of the BC MB Conference.

[51] *Being a Faithful Church 7: Summary and Recommendation on Sexuality 2009-2015.* General Board, Mennonite Church Canada, https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21757/BFC-7.pdf, accessed November 15, 2018.

[52] "Can our disagreements about sexuality be solved with the Bible?" https://www.ambs.edu/

This statement is helpful, because Bible study that focuses on the *process* rather than simply the *product*—for example, beliefs about sexual ethics or other matters—will more likely create real consensus because a common process or method will generate unity better than an insistence on a single, often predetermined, answer or belief. Denominational identity cannot exist without a willingness to engage in ongoing conversation even where agreement is difficult to discern. I believe that a common core of conviction based on a common theological method is necessary to anchor Canadian MBs. It remains to be seen whether such a core can be discovered and whether it can provide an adequate basis for identity—for MBs or for Canadian Mennonites in general.

In this article I have sought to move the conversation more explicitly towards issues of theological method so that MBs (and others) can have more fruitful dialogue, greater mutual understanding, and ultimately greater unity. This conversation will ideally generate agreement on principles that should guide theological reflection and how they should interact. Such a theological core will not result from appealing to either an evangelical vision or an Anabaptist Vision. Rather, it will be necessary to imagine a new theological vision together—and thereby to create a new identity.

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publishing/blog/715830/can-our-disagreements-about-sexuality-be-solved-with-the-bible, accessed November 11, 2018.

Dan Nighswander. *1 Corinthians.* Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017.

This volume, part of the Believers Church Bible Commentary series, attends to trends in biblical scholarship, textual details, and applications of the text in contemporary society, and thus offers a valuable resource for pastors, students, and laypeople alike. Following Margaret Mitchell's *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), Nighswander agrees with many currents in biblical scholarship that recognize the centrality of Paul's call for unity (32). He reminds readers of this point at several places. Similarly, he uses the central theme to offer valuable insights about how the text (especially chapter 14) might contribute to the pursuit of unity in worship communities today (309-12). The commentary maintains a sense of coherence even as it addresses the biblical text pericope by pericope.

Nighswander pays careful attention both to the contextual elements that contribute to the letter (e.g., authorship, audience, social context) and to the implications for modern communities of faith that receive it as a part of a larger scriptural collection. He persistently attends to issues of economic and social status that pervade Paul's language, noting how matters of wealth seem to be in the background of the Apostle's words. Examples include the Corinthians' acceptance of a man who has his father's wife on the grounds that the man might be a wealthy patron (134), access to court litigation available primarily to the wealthy (146), and the ability of the wealthy to obtain and eat meat on a regular basis (195, 198). In attending to these realities, the author shows how the call for unity pervading the epistle goes beyond spiritual issues.

Nighswander also addresses social issues that might be influencing the text, including honor and shame. He discusses how Paul uses shame as a motivator to change his audience's behavior both in the case of pursuing court litigation (1 Cor. 6:1-6; 147) and in the case of the use of head coverings (1 Cor. 11:4-15; 242). Additionally, in brief essays in an appendix, the author considers the larger social function of honor and shame within the Corinthian context (368-69). In translating these issues to a modern context, he also helpfully notes how constructions of what is shameful are "culturally defined" (249) and require cultural translation for different times and places.

In attending to cultural differences between 1st-century Corinth and the 21st-century Western world, Nighswander pauses at several points to suggest how the ethical principles that Paul is promoting might be translated to a modern audience. In general, these connections are fair and sympathetic. For example, in his discussion of 1 Cor. 13, Nighswander observes the ways in which Paul's words have been used to coerce victims of abuse to remain in unhealthy situations, and he suggests an alternative understanding of the text that would allow for correcting problematic behavior (291). One might wish, however, for this sympathetic position to be more consistent. Nighswander acknowledges that toxic family relations could make Paul's positioning of himself as a parental figure (1 Cor. 4:14-21) difficult to hear for some audiences. However, he brushes this concern aside rather quickly, suggesting instead that readers in healthy families will understand Paul's intention (123). Likewise, the author's uncritical use of John Howard Yoder's scholarship evidences a lack of sensitivity that is a bit surprising from an author with extensive pastoral experience.

This volume offers an interpretation of the biblical text that is easily accessible to a layperson. Although Nighswander occasionally makes points that rest on nuances in Paul's usage of Greek grammar or vocabulary, he explains these matters clearly. For example, as he examines Paul's use of the verb "raised" in chapter 15, he provides a clear description of what the voice, tense, and mood of the verb suggest about Paul's meaning (323). Likewise, a lightly annotated bibliography of resources offers good direction to laypeople interested in pursuing these topics in more depth. Preachers preparing sermons on texts from 1 Corinthians will appreciate the connections made to other lectionary texts that are read on the same days as those the author examines. Upper-level undergraduate students or early graduate students will also benefit from Nighswander's understandable introduction to several interpretive issues. This recent addition to the Believers Church Bible Commentary series thus has much to recommend it.

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Gary Harder. *The Pastor-Congregation Duet*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2018.

The Pastor-Congregation Duet is a "testimony" (259) to a love of the church and the calling of pastoral ministry by Gary Harder, a valued leader and pastor of the Mennonite Church in Canada. He invites pastors and congregations into a healthy, albeit complex, relationship likening it to a musical duet. At the heart of this relationship, as he reflects on more than 50 years of pastoral ministry, is a "growing covenant of mutuality . . . deep respect, love, and accountability" (xv). His story spans a volume of time, with significant shifts in theological and biblical thinking and worldviews, and changing expectations of the church. He examines how a pastor navigates the challenges and joys of ministry, and how a congregation supports and enriches pastoral leaders.

Harder's love of music, a source of comfort and encouragement in his ministry and for his life story, is central to this composition. He reflects on developing his solo voice along with various duets. He is forthright with his own story of pastoral ministry, the congregations he has been in relationship with, and a complementing marriage duet. He offers candid accounts of harmony in relationship as pastor and congregation, as well as of times of dissonance when relationships are challenging and do not end well. He surveys his experience with honesty, sharing his struggles with openness and vulnerability. He offers pastoral wisdom, lessons gleaned through developing his own voice. In this way, readers can learn of the missteps and fragility of human relationships, as well of the messy and fallible church. Yet, gratitude and grace are woven into the stories Harder shares and the wisdom he has gained: "We all need continuous conversion to God's way and God's love" (248). From his extensive experience and reflection in pastoral ministry, he maintains that "God is in the blessing business" (179), working through and in spite of God's people.

This volume is in four parts. Part 1 focuses on the congregation as a duet partner. Each of the four chapters in this part is dedicated to the author's journey in ministry: his education and calling, and the congregations where he has worked. Part 2 offers his insights on developing his own voice. Each of the three chapters offers a unique reflection. He shares stories about the importance of nurturing physical and emotional well-being, and his pleasure

in music and the vitality and solace it provides for his soul is expanded in this section. One chapter is devoted to the many rhythms of the marriage duet. Harder shares his journey with a duet of mutual and equal voices, its "huge role in sustaining my energy and love of pastoral ministry" and "in nurturing my inner voice and my sense of self" (121).

Part 3 explores when music is festive, the special occasions in congregational life and pastoral ministry. Through stories of baptism, parent-child dedication, weddings, and funerals, Harder demonstrates his learnings, vulnerabilities, humility, and good humor. In these accounts, readers can enter into his wrestling with theological and biblical matters, reflecting on deep questions of faith and life and how they are shaped and shape the church. Part 4 considers when music is discordant. Harder normalizes conflict as a given, "perhaps even healthy . . . as a catalyst for growth and deeper engagement" (215). He looks at dissonant notes in a variety of ministry settings through the lens of an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective of the priesthood of all believers, where every voice is valued and welcomed yet can present unique challenges for pastoral leadership. This section concludes with a poignant personal example, "sharing some of my struggles in my journey toward inclusion of LGBTQ people" (228).

In the postlude, Harder asks whether retirement ends one's calling, and goes on to describe how he is personally answering that question (257-60). At the end, he succinctly and significantly summarizes the pastoral-congregation duet with words of hope and encouragement for all.

Throughout the book, the author includes sermons, stories, articles, and prayers from his ministry. These interludes illustrate the context of the pastoral relationship, the wrestling to understand pastoral leadership and a healthy relationship between pastor and congregation, and the refrains of blessing. This is a book for pastors and congregations, particularly for those who attend to the relationship between the two. Pastors will be encouraged with heartfelt reflections, while congregants will benefit from a pastor's perspective on life and pastoral ministry—the challenges, joys, and hopes. *The Pastor-Congregation Duet* conveys and promotes the importance of developing a healthy relationship between the partners.

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J. Lawrence Burkholder. *Mennonite Ethics: From Isolation to Engagement.* Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2018.

Mennonite Ethics, a posthumous collection of Anabaptist-Mennonite theologian J. Lawrence Burkholder's major works, consists of three volumes: (1) "Nonconformity Examined," (2) "Social Responsibility," and (3) "The Third Way." It follows other recent and notable publications related to Burkholder's life and work, including Rodney J. Sawatsky and Scott Holland, eds., *The Limits of Perfection: A Conversation with J. Lawrence Burkholder* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1993), and Burkholder's memoirs, *Recollections of a Sectarian Realist: A Mennonite Life in the Twentieth Century* (Institute for Mennonite Studies, 2017).

     With the addition of an editor's preface, volume one is Burkholder's master's thesis, "Nonconformity Examined," completed at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1951. Here Burkholder traces the roots of sectarian nonconformity among Swiss Anabaptists and their descendants (including Hutterites, Amish, and "Old" Mennonite Church). He claims that for these Mennonites, nonresistance is the fundamental principle underlying all Christian social relationships. This principle is informed by the view that "Christian relationships on the one hand and worldly relationships on the other are contradictory" (152). Significantly, nonresistance is a personal ethic for disciples of Christ, not a political philosophy (175). Therefore, the contribution of the Mennonite Church to society is to be a "righteous minority, which upholds an impossible ideal before the larger society" (182). Burkholder critiques this logic in his doctoral dissertation.

     Burkholder completed his doctoral thesis, "The Problem of Social Responsibility from the Perspective of the Mennonite Church" at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1958. It was first published in 1989 by the Institute of Mennonite Studies and is republished here with minor changes. Burkholder focuses on social responsibility and the dilemma it posed for American Mennonites at the time (specifically, those within "The Mennonite Church" conference). The primary concern for some of these Mennonites was how to remain separate from an evil culture while living in it (233). For Mennonites who did not view culture negatively, the issue was how to maintain a high ethic of Christ while also working to meet the immediate needs of those

around them (234). Could the ethic of Jesus be the basis for an ethic of culture, or were they opposed (239)?

Burkholder offers a response to these questions and concerns. Engaging theologian and ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr, most notably Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), he claims that there is tension between Christ and culture for Mennonites. He agrees with Niebuhr that Mennonites "'not only renounce all participation in politics and refuse to be drawn into military service, but follow their distinctive customs and regulations in economics and education'" (241). However, unlike Niebuhr, he claims this is no longer true of all individual Mennonites. He argues that many now intentionally participate in social and political life, and all are complicit participants in the social order. Therefore, they must pay attention to power, adopt justice as a norm, and wrestle with the essentials of Christianity and the realities of daily social living (466-68).

Volume three presents Burkholder's research paper, "The Third Way" (1969). It engages Luther's "third way" ecclesiology, which, while rejected by Luther himself, became integral to the Believers Church. Burkholder likely began this work while on sabbatical from Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, England, in 1965 and 1966 (489). The paper is informed by the context of postwar Europe, including church renewal, and social developments in America. The author articulates ecclesial mission first and foremost, as social action within an understanding of ecclesiology/ethics that "acknowledge[s] that evangelical Christianity need[s] an evangelical organization" (491).

Theologically, Burkholder's articulation of a third way stems from a high view of the church as described, for example, in the Gospel according to Matthew and the writings of Paul. Matthew 18:15-20, normative for much of believer's church ecclesiology, reveals the responsibility of the church as the gathered body of Christ to "bind and to loose" with regard to church discipline (495). Remarkably, Burkholder affirms the value of Matthew 18 for Mennonite ethics without idealizing it: "It is, of course, assumed that discernment is imperfect" (528). Therefore, an important question is, Who has the right to bind and to loose? Taking account of unequal power relationships within the community of faith, including what is at stake and for whom, is a necessary starting point for discipleship ethics (497).

Burkholder's critical and realistic view of Matthew 18 is imperative. Without such a view of unequal power relationships of power, this NT chapter can be used, and has been used, to further harm those with less social and ecclesial power, including victims of abuse, by putting them in a position to address their abuser directly without any support or protection. Burkholder's realism is worth celebrating.

Mennonite Ethics is an important and long overdue contribution to the field of Anabaptist-Mennonite theological ethics. Burkholder's work will resonate with theologians aware of the church's responsibility to address its complicity in social inequalities. The ethics he proposes invite more voices into the conversation about Anabaptist-Mennonite identity and discipleship.

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Willard M. Swartley. *Jesus, Deliver Us: Evil, Exorcism, and Exousiai*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019.

Willard Swartley is one of the most significant Mennonite biblical scholars of the last fifty years. His main purpose in this book is to make the biblical-theological case that Christian "deliverance ministry" (utilizing exorcistic practice to free individuals from the oppression of demonic powers) and "witness to the powers" (confronting and subverting the spiritual forces at work in social, political, and economic structures) are "two sides of the same coin" (2-3). He argues that both practices are rooted in the depiction of evil and God's confrontation with it across the Testaments, culminating with God's triumphant victory over all other powers through Jesus. The church, living in the light of Jesus' lordship over all, is called to carry forward this victory. Swartley contends that confrontation with the (defeated) powers—both those that oppress individuals and those that seek to exert their destructive intent at a systemic level—is a biblically mandated, critical aspect of Christian praxis. Modeled upon how Jesus himself confronted his adversaries, such action takes the form of peacemaking.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part 1, Swartley looks at the presence and diverse portrayals of evil in Scripture and how—although its basis (the call to trust in God) remains consistent—the response to evil in the OT is transformed in the NT. An analysis of the themes of evil and deliverance in the Psalms, Proverbs, and prophets provides a transition to Part 2, in which he systematically examines these themes across the NT canon: in Mark, Matthew, and Luke-Acts, the Pauline and Johannine corpora, and Hebrews and the General Epistles.

Finally, in Part 3, Swartley examines the theology and practice of deliverance across church history: first, in terms of the early church's varied responses to the diverse ways evil was understood to manifest itself in the world; then, with chapters focused on responses to "the powers" and demonic oppression; and last, with an exhortation to the church to embrace a "holistic approach to Jesus' victory over evil" by perceiving how these practices share the same biblical foundation.

What is most impressive here is the formidable amount of source material with which Swartley engages. His lifetime of studying the biblical texts pays rich dividends, as he ranges widely across their breadth, demonstrating how evil and God's confrontation with it are deeply woven into the language and narrative of the Bible. The book's concluding chapters, which uphold the centrality of the Scriptures but focus primarily on historical and sociological matters, are also impressive. For instance, the author's examination of the central place of exorcistic/deliverance language within early catechetical practice powerfully sets forth the belief that to "become a Christian" meant stepping out from under the rule of one authority and transferring allegiance to a new Lord (221-28). Much of Swartley's passion for this topic is presumably due to his own experience with deliverance ministry, and the personal testimony he includes is powerful (e.g., 125-26, 146-47).

However, the book's range and diversity present a challenge, namely the need for a clear framework onto which to map the abundance of information presented. Unfortunately, Swartley rarely indicates how a given chapter contributes to the book's overall purpose. Moreover, where he does make such references, he articulates his goals in subtly diverse ways (see, e.g., 33, 34, 131, 298). The result is that the book reads at times as an exhaustive

presentation of the biblical data on a theme, without a consistent sense of what is being argued by means of it.

Nevertheless, the author builds a strong biblical-theological foundation for his emphatic exhortation to the church to take deliverance ministry more seriously. This includes the necessity of being more open to the possibility of demonic oppression in people's lives. Commendably, he makes this case without minimizing the significance of mental illness and its effects, stating that "The ideal is for medical and spiritual healers to cooperate. Each needs the diagnostic abilities of the other" (264).

However, while Swartley displays admirable nuance in such an exhortation, in other places this seems absent, most notably when he directly associates demonic influence with things like heavy metal music and films or stories involving witchcraft/wizardry (e.g., 262-63). To imply that all such artistic expressions are inherently dangerous because of some kind of Satanic association is reductionistic; to name an epic fantasy like *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (298 n. 52, referencing the work of Andrew Hardy et al.) suggests ignorance of the deeply Christian foundations of Tolkien's incredible body of literature. Finally, it must also be noted that a number of missteps overlooked in the editorial process distract from, and even confuse, points the author is trying to make.

With *Jesus, Deliver Us*, Swartley addresses an aspect of biblical theology all too often overlooked in contemporary Christian discourse, conclusively demonstrating its presence in the Scriptures, and making a convincing case for its centrality to the calling placed upon those who follow the resurrected and exalted Lord Jesus. For anyone seeking insight into the biblical portrayal of evil, deliverance, and the significance of these themes for the life and thought of the church today, this volume will be of great value.

Jesse Nickel, Biblical Studies Faculty, Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Conference Notice

INDIGENOUS-MENNONITE ENCOUNTERS

May 14-16, 2021
A **Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites** Conference

Conrad Grebel University College
Waterloo, Ontario

In October 2000 the History of Aboriginal-Mennonite Relations Conference was held at the University of Winnipeg. Much has happened in Indigenous-Canadian relations since then, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the "Idle No More" movement, awareness of the impact of the "Sixties Scoop," and initiatives to Indigenize post-secondary institutions. At the same time Mennonite organizations, churches, and individuals are establishing new relationships with Indigenous communities, reconsidering their settler narratives, and assessing their roles in past injustices.

The Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies is pleased to host a Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites conference in 2021 on the theme of Indigenous-Mennonite encounters. The conference location is significant, as Mennonites were the first European settlers on this land, the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples, comprising Block 2 of the Haldimand Tract granted in 1784 to the Six Nations. Waterloo is also near both the first area of settlement for Mennonites in Canada and the largest First Nations reserve in Canada, Six Nations of the Grand River.

The conference will involve Indigenous and Mennonite voices and will focus on building present relationships through discovering the past.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND A CALL FOR PROPOSALS WILL FOLLOW.

Marlene Epp and Laureen Harder-Gissing,
Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies,
Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1

C a l l   f o r   P r o p o s a l s

HOPE, DESPAIR, LAMENT
Graduate Student Conference IX

June 18-20, 2020

Eastern Mennonite University
Harrisonburg, VA

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?
Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?-- Habakkuk 1:2

What is the role of hope, despair, and lament for a people of peace in a world marked by polarization, violence, and ecological catastrophe? How might the church make sense of an uncertain future, and what possible futures might emerge from and for the church? Are there resources within Anabaptist/Mennonite faith traditions that speak to our current moment?

Hosted by the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, this conference invites proposals for scholarly papers and other presentations aimed at a scholarly audience that explore hope, despair, and/or lament. The aim is to offer a forum for graduate students working on Anabaptist/Mennonite related topics and/or belonging to Anabaptist/Mennonite traditions to present their research in an interdisciplinary and ecumenical context and to engage with colleagues and peers.

We welcome proposals from disciplines including but not limited to theology, biblical studies, patristics, pastoral/practical studies, ethics, philosophy, religious studies, peacebuilding and conflict transformation studies, anthropology, sociology, gender studies, diaspora and transnational studies, history, literature, and musicology.

Travel bursaries may be available to qualifying presenters.
Accommodation details TBA.
For more information: http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/tmtcgradconference

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: FEBRUARY 1, 2020

Send your proposal (300 words max., incl. title) to mennonite.centre@utoronto.ca.
Include your name and affiliation only in your e-mail cover, not in the proposal.