Provenance

II. Preserving the Culture

Loving, but drastic, action will be needed to save the doctrine [of separation and nonconformity] and its expressions within the brotherhood — OSCAR BURKHOLDER.[1]

We should be faithfully concerned about our mother tongue, to use it and to preserve it. We should be prepared to make big sacrifices, for this glorious heritage is for us a holy obligation — A.J. SCHELLENBERG.[2]

KEEPING THE YOUNG PEOPLE and preserving the culture, as has already been noted, were in constant tension with each other, but this did not mean that one had to be sacrificed to preserve the other. To be sure, they were, or appeared to be, in diametric opposition, whenever youth's impulse for change faced directly culture's respect for the status quo and whenever the inclination of the young to accept contemporary styles or to use the English language clashed with the determination of the older generation to preserve the old ways and the German language. Yet, the notion that Mennonite religion and culture was a total way of life, which it was good for the young to accept, was not easily set aside, and thus, more often than not, the concerns for youth and culture went hand in hand.

In the Mennonite situation, culture had at least two different but deeply interwoven meanings. On the one hand, Mennonite culture was the Mennonite way of life, firmly rooted in biblical religion, holistic in its theology, with a seven-day-a-week life-embracing ethic that called for a separation from the state and from the larger society.

It centred in the family and in the congregational community, both of which were viewed as images of the kingdom of God, both present and coming.

Culture also meant, or had come to mean, particular styles in which the Mennonite way of life appeared and without which it could not exist. Thus, for some Mennonites, culture above all meant agriculture and land-based communities. For others, for whom land had become less than absolutely essential, cultural priorities were focused on such factors as language. Then there were those for whom both land and the language had become secondary, and for them culture meant a particular nonconformed life style. Finally, for some Mennonites, none of the above were important as both religion and culture shifted to new arenas of experience and understanding.

Culture Interpreted and Explained

The efforts to preserve the culture were mostly focused internally, that is, within the Mennonite community, but bold attempts were also made to bring about an appreciation for, or at least accurate information about, the Mennonite way of life on the outside. The continuity of that way of life, it was recognized, required a much better public understanding. The Mennonites had devoted too little attention to defending and interpreting themselves, and thus, false reports in the media had done very considerable damage.

The negative publicity accompanying conscription in the Great War, the "nationalization" of the public schools, the emigrations to Latin America, the immigrations from Russia, the Friesen-Braun trials, and Canadian reluctance to admit Moscow refugees had taken their toll, and something had to be done to increase public acceptance and to strengthen Mennonite self-respect. To help prevent the "Mennonite problem" (*Mennonitenfrage*) from becoming acute again, the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada in 1930 appointed a public relations committee (*Aufklaerungskomitee*).[3]

This initiative to bring about public enlightenment was an unprecedented undertaking, although individuals like David Toews and H.S. Bender had taken on the press from time to time. It was also unorthodox in the sense of the Mennonite assumption that misunderstanding, not unlike persecution, was one of the by-products of the faith and that its quiet endurance was one of the virtues of Christian life. Moreover, the best public relations for the Mennonites, it had

always been assumed, were the Mennonite people themselves. As Johann G. Rempel, the spokesman for the committee, suggested:

> Our young people are studying at the universities, our girls working as domestics in the homes in large and small cities, the teachers from our people, our businessmen and farmers, in short—all [our people in the various] vocations, are involved consciously or unconsciously in negative or positive public relations [*Aufklaerungsarbeit*] for our people.[4]

Helpful literature was seen, however, as a useful supplement to a good reputation and the communications emanating therefrom. Therefore, the works of C. Henry Smith, the eminent Mennonite historian of the time, were strategically distributed.[5] *The Mennonites of America* and *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*, however, were somewhat far removed from the contemporary situation in that the former concentrated on the Mennonites in the U.S.A. and the latter on the immigration of the nineteenth century.

One of the most useful tools of enlightenment, therefore, became a 1932 pamphlet *The Mennonites*, first presented as an address by H.H. Ewert before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba. The monograph was published and distributed by the committee in both the English and the German language, the latter obviously for internal consumption. H.H. Ewert identified the Mennonites as a pioneer religious society, whose way of life was unique and worthy of perpetuation.[6] They were, he said, "the first to deny the authority of the state over the individual conscience, to take a positive stand against war, and to raise a protest against slavery."[7]

An event similar to Ewert's appearance to interpret the Mennonites before a regional historical society also happened in the east, when S.F. Coffman addressed the Waterloo Historical Society on "The Adventure of Faith."[8] Coffman listed Anabaptist leaders Grebel, Manz, and Menno among those religious adventurers who "set at liberty the conscience of men." They and their followers lived "a simple life, a pure life, and a peaceful life" and endured "hardship, suffering, persecution" like no others for their nonresistant faith. Everywhere they witnessed to their faith "in its three-fold form: liberty of conscience, separation of church and state, and obedience to the gospel of the prince of peace." While the pioneers gave "no inheritance of millions to their children," they bequeathed

the treasures of character, of love for the Bible, and of peace for all mankind.

The historical sense communicated by Coffman several years later became a resolve on the part of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario to have its history preserved and recorded. The Old Mennonites were keenly aware that the New Mennonites had published their first history in 1920, albeit not solely for Ontario but for the whole denomination.[9] Lawrence J. Burkholder completed and published in 1936 the first book-length history of all the Mennonites of Ontario.[10] He viewed his people as a cultural force, "a strong resistance against the inroads" of evil forces such as "materialism, unbelief, and other forms of worldliness."[11]

Burkholder's review led him to be optimistic about "the outlook for the Mennonite Church" if only the various branches thereof could "celebrate a genuine spiritual union on a strictly scriptural basis."[12] A small beginning of "a few struggling settlers in the woods" had grown into a strong body of about 8,000 church members in about 60 regular preaching places. Several thousand children would undoubtedly grow up to "perpetuate the doctrine for which our forefathers died" and as far as the young people were concerned, "we are holding our own." About 1,700 had attended Bible school and other hundreds were taking part in other young people's functions.

> Generally, we are able to maintain our regular places of work. There has been very little retrenchment. New fields are being opened. The aggressive missionary spirit is gratifying. . . .[13]

The influential role of Mennonite religious culture in preserving and propagating certain values was noted also by Jacob H. Janzen. A prolific writer of interpretative articles for the Mennonite press as well as curricular materials for children—his *Tales of Mennonite History* was the first such English-language source produced in Canada—Janzen recognized that a full assessment of Mennonitism was not possible until more time had passed.[14] An epoch of church and world history, and not just a lifetime, were required to see a movement in its true perspectives. Judgements could not be made by the makers of history but by those who, in due course, analysed and wrote about it. Janzen did not subscribe to the view that Mennonites possessed the full and complete truth.

Yet, history had already made a judgement and, according to Janzen, it was a favourable one. Evidence thereof could be seen in the fact that many governments permitted the Mennonites to affirm rather than to swear and that even in Canada an almost limitless trust was extended to them as, for instance, in the business dealings of everyday life. All that was a heritage passed on from earlier generations of believers whose faith was a sound one. And faith's application in daily life is what counted:

> The world today knows very little or nothing about the special teachings of the Mennonites, but the strength and influence of their faith were known, and to the world that is all that mattered.[15]

For Janzen, the positive features of Mennonitism were represented by baptism upon confession of faith—he used the word adult baptism (*Grosstaufe*)—nonresistance, non-swearing of the oath, and the de-emphasis of ritualistic forms. Baptism upon confession of faith, he said, represented the struggle for a decisive and conscientious Christianity. Nonresistance was the symbol of the longing and the struggle for a world-embracing love which alone could save mankind. The non-swearing of the oath signified a higher loyalty and the struggle for truthfulness and veracity. And the lack of formalism was a sign that the peaks of Christian living were not to be sought in a highly developed ritual but rather in a fulfilled and sanctified daily life, in other words, in a practical Christianity.

The representative writings of persons like L.J. Burkholder, S.F. Coffman, H.H. Ewert, J.H. Janzen, and C. Henry Smith all reflected the deep conviction that the Anabaptist pioneers had rediscovered the true essence of the Christian faith, that this essence was contemporaneously represented, at least in theory, in the Mennonite way of life, and that its perpetuation deserved a special effort and required the help of certain factors, here identified as culture. Some preservative energies, of course, were concentrated on the past only, but even the two small archives that were established appeared because the record of the past was helpful for the future. Burkholder not only wrote the first book-length history of the Mennonites in Ontario, but along with that project began an archival collection, which, lacking any other appropriate placement, found its safekeeping in the Toronto archives of the Ontario government. The ratio-

nale for such record-keeping was that it would benefit the generations to follow. In the words of S.F. Coffman:

> We have lost a great deal of experience and have had many trials which otherwise might have been avoided had we the records of some of our brethren who have passed on without leaving us some guide by which to attain greater successes and avoid failures.[16]

The only other archives established at this time were in western Canada, where B.J. Schellenberg, a Russlaender, obtained token support ($25 a year) from the Conference of Mennonites in Canada to do something about preserving the Russian Mennonite heritage.[17] Russia was a precious homeland, and while it was gone forever it had to be remembered, said Schellenberg. Even the rich archives gathered by P.M. Friesen and others had been disturbed. It was desirable and necessary, therefore, to found an archives to restore and preserve as much as possible of that which had been lost.

> We left much behind. We were so blessed by earthly goods. We were rich in spiritual culture. Men full of spirit and life contributed to our development and many good schools we could call our own. Our settlements with their culture were like an oasis in the desert.[18]

Varieties of Separate Culture

Those who championed Mennonite religious culture generally believed that its expression and preservation required particular forms, moulds, or styles. Thus, culture was both an end and a means to an end; both substance and style; both wine and wineskins. However culture was defined, for most Mennonites it had, or had to have, a separatist quality about it. Long ago, the preservation of the Mennonite way of life had come to be associated with separation from the world. This remained true to a very considerable extent in the 1930s, though the particular focus of that separation varied among the different Mennonite groups. Basically there were three forms: geographic separatism, which tended to be the most extreme and the most inclusive of all other forms of separatism; social separatism, which took the nonconformity doctrine very seriously; and linguistic separatism, which in the 1930s translated itself into an unprecedented crusade to maintain the *Muttersprache* (mother tongue).

All three forms of separatism had been important to Mennonite immigrants coming into the country, and since geographic separation embraced them all, the lands of the German Land Company, the German Block of the Amish, and the East and West Reserves in Manitoba represented Mennonite culture in its most inclusive and concentrated form. As geographic separatism had become less and less possible, those to whom it was most important became the more insistent on that option. Among the Swiss, the Old Order Mennonites and the Old Order Amish represented the clearest examples of that position. Among the Dutch, the emigrants to Mexico and Paraguay had been the most unequivocal in this regard. As one sociologist wrote about that kind of Mennonite boundary maintenance:

> It is through the continuing efforts to maintain some semblance of geographical separation from the surrounding secular community, that the members of the church community reinforce their concept of cultural identity and maintain not only geographical boundaries but symbolic boundaries as well.[19]

Those Mennonites whose identity and survival were no longer linked to isolated parcels or colonies of land, or even to agriculture, but who none the less wanted to preserve the Mennonite ways, had to find other means to maintain the boundaries. For one sector of the Swiss Mennonite community this meant applying rather strict social nonconformity standards, in other words a distinctive life style. For one sector of the Dutch Mennonite community the German language was the all-important value not to be surrendered, lest all be lost. Like the land, so the nonconformed life style and the German language represented values in themselves, but they were also the actual and symbolic fences which kept the world out and Mennonite values intact.

Beyond the continuum of Mennonite cultural retentionists, for whom their religious way of life was incomplete without land and/or the nonconformed life style and/or the German language, were those Mennonites, one congregational family in particular, for whom all of these things had become unimportant or even a hindrance to the pursuit of the essentials. It wasn't that the Mennonite Brethren in Christ all left the farms or wore flashy clothing, but their explicit

definition of religious faith and their implicit definition of culture had moved them rather far away from traditional Mennonite emphases.[20]

This was not surprising because their emergence in the nineteenth century had been a reaction to those who "clung tenaciously to the old traditions of the church."[21] The "New Mennonites," as they were popularly called, led in the introduction of the English language, four-part singing, and adjustment to change generally. That denomination became an example of how cultural change at one level tends to go hand in hand with changes at other levels. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ changed not only the styles, including the ministry, church government, and mode of baptism, but also the substance, as they became "so different from the various Mennonite groups in both doctrine and practice."[22] On the basis of the New Mennonite experience and his study of Mennonite assimilation, Paul Knowles concluded that to become a New Mennonite meant eventually to become a non-Mennonite.[23] It was the intuitive sense that a changing form produced, or was accompanied by, a change in religious essence that made other Mennonites zealous about culture maintenance. Upon observing the New Mennonites, the Old Mennonites and the Old Order Mennonites knew that the faith could be lost if they neglected the forms.

The New Mennonites continued to carry the name "Mennonite" and they saw themselves still within the nonresistant family of Christians, but their preachers rarely spoke on the subject and the borrowings from other traditions were extensive: from the Wesleyans, they accepted revivalism, a second work of grace, doctrines of holiness and the notion of complete sanctification, and new forms of church government; from the Pentecostals, the emphasis on the holy spirit, though never sufficiently to satisfy those who were really Pentecostal at heart; from the Calvinists, elements of predestination; and from the Darbyites, pre-millennialism.[24]

The new doctrines, the new spiritual styles, and the new ways of expressing the church life of the New Mennonites all had the effect of separating religion from its interwovenness with land and an economic order and with culture or a particular social order. The culture of the New Mennonites was the institutional church and the individual spirituality of the believer. No Mennonite group had advanced further down the road of finding one's religious identity in a

personalized salvation, a futurized millennium, and an institutionalized church than had the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Of all the conference-oriented Mennonites, they were the most conference-centred. A wide array of activities were statistically accounted for with the help of presiding elders, superintendents of various kinds, and an almost endless list of committees.[25] In 1940, one Conference of 25 congregations and 2,304 members had no fewer than 30 committees reporting to the annual meeting.[26]

The Conference wasn't really without culture, but rather immersed totally in a new kind of denominational and institutional culture. The New Mennonites were in many ways becoming non-Mennonites, and given that fact, it should surprise no one that there were calls for a complete erasure of the Mennonite identity. Such requests were strongest from Alberta and Saskatchewan, where public images of Mennonites and public linkages with Hutterites and Doukhobors were felt as keen embarrassments and a hindrance to missionary work. A resolution of the Canadian North-West District Conference requested the church to "lay aside every weight" and change its name:

> Whereas there are many thousands of Mennonites from foreign countries already in Canada, and hundreds more are coming each year, who have but one thing in common with the MBC church, namely "non-resistance," and have many things which are quite objectionable, both to citizenship and spirituality on account of which the name Mennonite has been brought into disrepute, thus becoming a great barrier and a positive hindrance to aggressive evangelism and church extension in the Canadian Northwest.[27]

The eastern sector of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ church was not quite as embarrassed by other Mennonites, hence not as willing, at least not yet, to change the name. But the determination with which other Mennonites defended the land, life style, and language-related concepts of Mennonitism, was undoubtedly part of the reason why the reaction to the culture was never-ending: not all Mennonites were ready to go to Mexico or Fort Vermilion, back into the nineteenth century, or to fall directly into the lap of those who tended to equate German culture with religious culture.

The Old Mennonites of Ontario bore a resemblance to the New

Mennonites in the sense that they too evidenced many signs of acculturation. They had resisted many of the new ways about a generation longer, but the acceptance of the English language in preaching and worship, of four-part singing, of revivalism and the Sunday school, of more sophisticated conference structures, and of business and professions had come in due course. In other words, external forms and expressions had changed to a considerable extent.

The changes in theology and teaching now so characteristic of the New Mennonites, however, were less marked among the Old Mennonites. To be sure, doctrinal fundamentalism, as earlier described, had made deep inroads, but the emphasis on traditional Anabaptist fundamentals, especially the ethical teachings—nonresistance and nonconformity—had not been lost. On the contrary, the intense struggle for those fundamentals, begun afresh in the early 1920s, reached its peak in the 1930s and early 1940s as the Old Mennonites, and Amish along with them, sought to maintain those cultural borders, the crossing of which in their opinion imperilled the faith. Nonconformity was seen as the key to the maintenance of the borders.

The Nonconformed Life Style

The doctrine and practice of nonconformity to the world was established as the clear teaching of the scriptures and of the Mennonite heritage, as well as a principle of life.[28] One of the clearest explications of the doctrine came from the pen of Edward Yoder, who explained his position on the basis of both history and theology. From the historical perspective, it was the nonconformed minority on whom the advancement of certain ideals had always depended. The forward march of the kingdom of God was a slow and difficult one into terrain "every inch of which is bitterly contested by the forces of spiritual wickedness." Movement into the occupied terrain required "seemingly slow and patient effort . . . sowing, nurture, cultivation, [and] careful husbandry on someone's part." And that someone was the nonconformed minority, living and teaching neglected truths.

> Separation, a measure of isolation, or if we will, of nonconformity to the prevailing environment, has been necessary for moral and spiritual culture in all ages.[29]

The philosophy of nonconformity was also behind the whole of the Old Testament history, Yoder explained. The life of Abraham and the Jewish nation represented "the principle of separation and of nonconformity" in biblical history. In order for that group of people to be a spiritual and moral blessing to the world, they had to be separated from their immediate surroundings, and they had to be schooled by special care and by a particular nurture. They needed to develop a tradition and "a national culture that embodied higher ideals of monotheism, of spiritual service and worship, of moral performance, than prevailed among mankind at large at that time."[30]

In the New Testament, Christ taught that his followers had to be separated from the world in their faith and life, even if this meant hostility, and that at the beginning of the church "there existed a compact and concentrated fellowship that marked them from the world and society at large." Much of this was changed after Emperor Constantine gave official recognition to the church. Christians lost their separateness, as they made alliances with the world "which became Christian in name, but in name only."[31] Thus, the line of demarcation between the church and the world was fatally obscured. However, nonconformity continued through small, separated groups including the medieval monastics, men and women who sought "a deeper spiritual culture." Other nonconformist groups were "Cathars, Novatians, Paulicians, Bogomils, Albigenses, Waldenses, Lollards, Anabaptists, Mennonites, Stundists. . . also Baptists, Independents and Assemblies of Brethren. . . ."[32]

In today's world a separated, nonconformed Christianity was necessary because there was no time when the "inevitable tension between his way of life, his divine gospel and the life of the surrounding world will cease to exist."[33] American society was a good example of the worldly spirit, the *Zeitgeist*, which had to be resisted. In America, conformity was "the social law" and everybody wore "the same sort of clothes, read the same sort of magazines, [belonged] to the same sort of social organizations."[34] The Puritan tradition was rapidly disappearing, as was evident in the "sabbath desecration, gambling, amusements both brutal and frivolous, the use of liquor. . .," and, what was most problematic of all, the system of state education, which "emphasized the secular and material side of life," in many places to the exclusion of religious teaching.[35]

The general reduction of cultural tastes, intellectual standards,

and morals "to the lowest denominator common to every citizen of the land" meant, of course, that the serious Christian church and the serious Christian had to offer resistance. And if the professed Christian church at large failed in this regard, then

> . . . let small groups heed the call to challenge the prevailing lukewarmness, indifferentism, worldliness, spiritual apathy of respectable society, by living a separated life, a Christlike life, a non-conformed life.[36]

Yoder was quick to recognize that nonconformity could be a negative phenomenon. No one should practise nonconformity "on merely unsocial or anti-social grounds." And conforming to a nonconformed group could also be misleading. One must, he said, "conform to Christ more than to even a non-conformed group."[37] Other writers also recognized that the teaching and practice of nonconformity could easily be abused or lead to undesirable consequences. This was evident throughout the Mennonite church, which was going through "a bewildering phase," resulting in many different interpretations "in different sections of the church."[38] There were two extremes, both of which should be avoided, according to one writer. One extreme view saw the essence of nonconformity only in "a uniform pattern of clothes prescribed by district conference." The other extreme view was devoid of specifics and expected only that Christians "live less extravagantly than non-Christians and have a genuine love for and practice of the simple life."[39]

Another problem was that nonconformity could lead to such extremes of isolation and insulation from the affairs of the world that some of the benefits of the world were denied.[40] Not only did a "self-chosen, restricted cultural status" mean the denial of such benefits but it also accounted for "the perpetual exodus of many of their most talented boys and girls."[41] And, equally important:

> It led inevitably to the deplorable error of renouncing as sinful the love of beauty in sound, color, and form.[42]

In the 1930s, however, Mennonite church leaders viewed insufficient nonconformity as a greater danger than excessive isolation. This fear was general among the Dutch, including both Russlaender and Kanadier groups, as well as among the Swiss Mennonites and Amish,

but it found its most concrete and continuous expression among the Old Mennonites, throughout the 1930s. Especially from 1936 on, when the Old Mennonite General Conference meeting in Kitchener had nonconformity as its main theme, until early into the next decade was this the case. Then a special session of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario reconfirmed the nonconformist principle as well as its application in no uncertain terms. Once again—the reader must not forget the Ontario crises of the 1920s, which split Kitchener's historic first church on this very issue—nonconformity was the chief item of discussion not only at church conferences and in many congregations, but also in the papers of the denomination. The weekly *Gospel Herald* and the monthly *Christian Monitor* were full of nonconformist stories. Besides two major article series on "present-day issues" and "non-conformity" in the weekly *Herald*, there were editorials, letters, and reader contributions of all kinds. Generally speaking, all made the point that "the principle and call to separation runs through the Bible from beginning to end."[43]

The practice of separation and the pursuit of nonconformity was no longer a simple matter as it once had been. For the first two centuries of Mennonite existence in North America, isolation and insulation had been not only tolerated but also fostered by general social conditions. The rural existence, the compact communities, the frontier psychology, and the spirit of individualism all contributed to the segregation so much desired by the church. The use of the German language likewise contributed to a feeling of separateness.[44]

All the traditional barriers to conformity had vanished, and it was now a question of finding substitute symbols of, and standards for, separation. The most prominent symbol of nonconformity turned out to be dress. And this was not inappropriate, because the dress question was the first thing that was mentioned after the fall of man.[45] Both the Old and the New Testaments taught frequently against vain display, against immodest apparel, against costly array, and spoke in favour of modest apparel and clothing that was both serviceable and economical.[46]

It was easier to assert that Christian nonconformity required certain standards of dress than to determine in a way satisfactory to all what such standards should be. What, for instance, was meant by modesty of dress? Since fashions were constantly changing, guidelines good for all time couldn't easily be laid down. However, one

could begin to establish some norm by rejecting the standards of the world and by applying some principles or tests to other options.[47] Three worldly standards were unacceptable without equivocation. They were: no apparel at all, meaning nudity; apparel insufficient or too flimsy, because God intended apparel for a covering and not for the advertising of the human form; and superfluous dress, meaning apparel for the purpose of ornamentation and display.[48]

It was too often the case, one writer complained, that the sisters and the brothers followed the fashion designers of the day.[49] "Colored neckties, fancy socks, stylish hats, and . . . other vanities," marked worldly men. Worldly women were those who "responded to the call of the world" when "the styles of the world called for full but short skirts" and who lengthened them only when "the fashion designers advertised a new trend." Even those "who wore a uniform garb" changed the design "from the full skirt to long, form-fitting skirt. . . ." All of which brought forth one preacher's lament:

> It is with shame that we must acknowledge that many Mennonites today have a great deal more respect for fashion journals than they do for divine revelation . . . for the fashion designers than they have for faithful ministers. . . .[50]

All clothing, it was said, should pass the test of modesty and decency. Men should not appear shirtless while at work or "in public with open neck bands or sleeves rolled up, or short sleeves, as if they were coming from firing a furnace of molten metal."[51] For women, insufficient clothing and transparent clothing were out, and this included "bathing suits, low-necked dresses, short sleeves, sleeveless dresses, high skirts, flesh-colored stockings, [going] stockingless, waistless, tight skirts, sheer dress showing the form, diverse colors pointing out form. . . ."[52] Showmanship and display were roundly condemned. This included "all attempts at dressing up the hair for show," all ornaments or jewellery, meaning also wedding rings.[53] Christian people should be guided by the test of simplicity, which ruled against the use of "ribbons, ruffles, neckties, stick pins, elaborate tuckings, fancy workings, multiplied suits of variable fashion, costly materials, useless buttons, powders, paint, curled hair, etc., etc."[54]

Other tests of appropriate apparel included distinction of the sexes

and church regulation. Obviously, men and women should be distinguishable by their clothing but beyond that "there should be sufficient uniformity among God's people to identify them in every phase of non-conformity as children of God."[55] Church members could not wear a soldier's uniform, a Boy Scout's uniform, the uniform of worldly organizations, or seasonal fads, but they should wear the uniform prescribed by the church. For the women this meant "the adopted form of devotional covering" and not substitutes like the loose veil, or hats, or caps, or worldly fashion bonnets, or fancy-textured bonnets.[56] For the men this meant the plain coat.[57]

Economy was a further test of the right thing to wear. The Christian should have a pattern that didn't have to be changed constantly with the changing styles of the world. The avoidance of coloured neckties and socks and fancy shirts, for instance, was an economy measure. Presumably, lower expenditures for clothing meant higher giving for the Lord. In one denomination, it was pointed out, the mission offering had dropped $65,000 a year when the dress question had been dropped.[58] A single set of clothes or a single kind of clothing represented economy but also democracy. In the words of editor Daniel Kauffman, one of the foremost nonconformity crusaders of the time:

> The Gospel of Christ nowhere upholds one standard of clothing for ministers and another standard for laymen; one standard for sisters and another for brethren; one standard to attend your own meeting and another standard when you attend other people's meetings; one standard when you are among your own people and another standard when you are among other people.[59]

Few issues on the annual agenda of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario brought forth resolutions so consistently in the 1930s as did the dress question. It was the problem which always pitted traditionalists and modernizers against each other, with the former wanting the rules enforced and discipline applied at least at the time of communion.[60] This meant the denial of the bread and the cup for the disobedient.

In 1934, for instance, the Conference appointed all the bishops "to study the dress question and to apply the result of their study to all the congregations by way of example, practice and discipline."[61] A year

later, they reported that "in the interests of Christian modesty and simplicity . . . we believe in the biblical teachings on the dress question (I Tim. 2:8–10, I Peter 3:1–7, Romans 12:2, Deut. 22:5, 1 John 2:15–17)."[62] Further, they concluded and recommended the following position: that the following of fashions, which change constantly, is deadly to the spiritual life; that the church cannot long imitate changing fashions without being led into following them entirely; that safety lies in breaking with changing fashions; that modesty and simplicity be insisted on; and that the "regulation garb" of the church be accepted as a practical solution to the problem.

For the carrying out of the above, the bishops recommended the preaching of biblical sermons on the dress problem frequently, appealing to the parents for co-operation, doing personal work by kindly and helpful appeals, calling in evangelists "who are effective on this problem," requesting the bishop of the district to preach at the church several evenings and make personal calls in the daytime, and requesting the assistance and co-operation of the ladies' aid. Further, the bishops suggested series of meetings in which the doctrines and disciplines were set forth, dress-related topics at the young people's institutes, and better counsel and examination of converts on this point before they were received into the fellowhip of the church. Loyal members were advised to encourage obedience to the principles. Then, if the desired result was not achieved, disciplinary action should be taken:

> . . . after proper work has been done with the offending member, that the same be visited, entreated to change, and, due time having elapsed, that the pastor notify the bishop in charge, and that scriptural action be taken, according to Matt. 18:17.

The 1935 position was difficult to enforce and a few years later the matter came up at the Conference again in the form of an inquiry as to eligibility for communion. Again the bishops were asked to study the question. Their reply revealed their impatience with the agitators on the dress issue and, in effect, told them to mind their own business. Reporting on behalf of the bishops, S.F. Coffman gave a seven-point set of principles for "governing the action of bishops and administering the ordinance of communion and in maintaining the proper order of fellowship with the church." Communion, he said, was adminis-

tered "on the basis of individual confession of peace with God and the brotherhood, rather than on the basis of the judgment of others."[63] There were signs that some bishops were becoming quite reluctant to deny communion on the basis of improper dress. A year later, the Conference once again asked the bishops to be consistent in administering the policy on the bonnet:

> This conference advises and pleads for: unity of administration among bishops; such administration to be carried out as follows: 1) settlement of all old standing cases; 2) keeping all members up to date; 3) adhering, in such administration, to both biblical provisions and conference provisions, relative to all other problems, as well as the bonnet.[64]

The problem did not go away, but instead the considerable deviation from the standards of the church only increased and led the Conference to make further attempts "to solve this very vexing and oft-appearing problem."[65] In one year it dominated the Conference program at the regular and special sessions on three separate occasions. After special study sessions on the doctrine of separation in the Old and New Testaments and its relation to the doctrine of nonresistance, resolutions were adopted that influenced the Conference's "Constitution and Discipline" to be more conservatively directed. The plain bonnet was reaffirmed as "the approved headdress of our sisters," and "faithful compliance" was insisted upon.[66] Further:

> We maintain that our brethren and sisters should conform to the same principles of modest apparel with the purpose to witness to the Scriptural truth of simplicity and separation. We also believe that the wearing of the plain suit for the brethren and the cape dress for the sisters would consistently bear such testimony.[67]

Apparently, the resolution was necessary to avoid another split, this time in the conservative direction, "for the Mennonite Church in Ontario is very near the parting of the ways again." But everybody knew that the resolution alone wouldn't avoid it unless members were "loyal and obedient" and unless the bishops "deal with this problem in unity." It was a "now or never proposition" to save "the doctrine [of nonconformity] and its expressions within the brotherhood."[68]

A year later, support for the adopted position came also from the

Mennonite General Conference, which likewise had a special session on the nonconformity issue to bring bishops, district conferences, and congregations into line on the doctrine of nonconformity as "immodest and worldly attire (including hats for sisters), the wearing of jewellery (including wedding rings)" was made "a test of fellowship in communion" and, if persisted in, "a test of membership."[69]

The dress question was the most prominent but not the only nonconformity issue. Also important was the protection of the worship service from forms, rituals, and exercises that excited the sensibilities and pleased the flesh rather than moved the soul to deeper reverence of God.[70] To that end, "the use of musical instruments in public worship" was discouraged in order to "teach the superiority of congregational singing over that accompanied by musical instruments."[71] Entertainment did not belong in the church and Mennonites should not follow modern churches:

> Instead of scripture reading, preaching, singing of hymns, etc., there is the music of the pipe organ, the voices of chanting choruses or the opera type of solo, the reading of secular literature, movies, etc. —exercises that excite the sensibilities, are pleasing to the flesh rather than moving the soul to deeper reverence for God.[72]

Nonconformity also meant abstaining from worldly amusements such as "Sunday ball games, card games, fairs, play parties, dances, festivals, billiards, theatres, and summer resorts."[73] After all, John the Baptist lost his head at a birthday party "that included dancing, drunkenness, and an oath."[74] It meant total abstinence because "no total abstainer ever became a drunkard" and because no one wanted to be "under the influence of liquor when the Lord comes."[75] It meant staying away from movies, operas, dances, night clubs, and swimming pools, which places all were "feeders of lust and immorality . . . the means of wrecking countless young lives and others as they are led into sexual sins."[76]

Nonconformity also ruled out "life insurance for Christians."[77] God and "the fellowship of the saints" provided "all that life insurance offers without its objectionable features." Besides, life insurance was bad stewardship "because not one-half of the money paid in premiums by the policyholders is returned." It was also

wrong to get something for a small investment and to place a money value upon a human life. Life insurance, said C.F. Derstine, was a species of gambling: it represented wealth gotten by vanity; it militated against labour and sacrifice; it undermined the law of frugality; it rejected trust in the Lord and help from relatives and the church; it violated Christian stewardship; it shut out the weak and the poor and the sick; it set aside the Lord's plan to aid the needy; and it fostered an independent spirit.[78]

Nonconformity meant not being "unequally yoked with unbelievers" or joining in "wrong affiliations."[79] Off limits were certain businesses because a Christian could enter business only to produce and distribute useful things.[80] The production and distribution of liquor and tobacco and the services of beauty parlours, movies, and billiard halls did not fall into this category. Nor did the making and selling of jewellery, powders, paints, lipsticks, and clothes of worldly design.

Nonconformity also meant non-membership in labour unions, because unionism resorted to violence and boycotts, which was anti-Christian, and because unionism destroyed personal freedom and individualism.[81] The "present day labor strikes" were offered as evidence and proof that nonresistant Christian people should hold themselves "aloof from every form of unionism, involving the unequal yoke with unbelievers."[82] The right of any man not to work, if in so doing he was not breaking a contract, was not questioned, "but violence resorted to by the labor organizations in an effort to prevent employers of labor to conduct their own business and to prevent non-union men from laboring cannot be defended." On unionism the Mennonite Conference of Ontario was unequivocal:

> In view of the intense activities of modern Unionism throughout the world, such as Bolshevism in Russia, and the CIO in North America . . . this conference wishes to reaffirm its position of non-affiliation [with] organizations that are both non-Christian and anti-Christian.[83]

Further, nonconformity meant not to be slothful in business. Misrepresentation in business transactions should be avoided and there should be no oppression or extortion. Having an abundance of capital was not a good enough reason for "living in luxury or extravagance." High-powered salesmanship was out, as was per-

suading a man to buy a new auto when he couldn't afford it. Get-rich-quick schemes, which had already made deep inroads among church members, were also warned against.

> Speculating in stocks and bonds, gambling on the Board of Trade, buying stock in oil wells, etc., etc., often truly are a source of great grief, and severe financial loss. As examples of real estate booms, we have cases in Florida, Texas, Montana, Canada, etc., where some of our well-meaning brethren have been victimized by unscrupulous promoters of real estate corporations.[84]

In a general way, the nonconformity emphasis of the Old Mennonites reflected the social ethic which most Mennonites in North America had claimed as their own at one time or another, with variations only in the specifics. Warnings against life insurance, the world of business, union membership, and worldly affiliation generally, and admonitions concerning immodest dress and indulgence in pleasure-related activities, were current in other Conferences, though nonconformity as a sustained crusade in this period in history most characterized the Old Mennonites.

Language and Values

There was, however, another crusade under way especially among the Russlaender, and this had to do with the preservation of the German language and ethnicity, and values related thereto. In the same way that the *Gospel Herald* and the *Christian Monitor* were overflowing with nonconformity concerns, so the papers serving the German-speaking Dutch Mennonites were characterized by admonitions concerning the German language and German identity. Chief among these was *Der Bote*, the weekly published at Rosthern by immigrants for the immigrants. But the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, published in Winnipeg, and the *Steinbach Post*, published in Steinbach, both of them edited by recent immigrants, were likewise vehicles of strong pro-German sentiments, though not written with the same intensity as could be found in *Der Bote*.[85] The *Post*'s readership consisted predominantly of Kanadier, who cared about things German but without Germany. The *Rundschau*'s readership was most cosmopolitan, inasmuch as it had subscribers in America, among the Kanadier, and also among the Russlaender.

It was the Russlaender, the most recent arrivals, for whom Germanism was a holy cause, partly because they were shocked to discover that their families could be anglicized in one generation and partly because they partook rather readily of the enthusiasm with which pan-Germanism filled the 1930s wherever there were German-speaking groups. The strong Germanism of the Russlaender had its roots partly in the ancestral Prussian home, partly in the Russian environment, and partly in the cultural relations between themselves and Germany prior to the Great War. Along with about one million other German-speaking Lutherans and Catholics in the Ukraine and Middle Volga regions, over 100,000 Mennonites in Russia had maintained an active interchange with the country and its institutions that had become their cultural mother. There were active intellectual-cultural relationships with Germany already before the Great War. In the words of one writer:

> In our schools we used German textbooks. German periodicals and books were found in every home. Mennonites pursued theological studies in Germany or Switzerland, received their vocational preparation in Germany, made holiday excursions to Germany, and went to Germany and Austria for medical treatment . . .[86]

It was in Prussia where the first major language transition of the Dutch Mennonites had been completed.[87] This happened well before the end of the eighteenth century, when immigrations to Russia began.[88] The Dutch language as an official church language was lost, but the related Low German dialect attained a greater significance as the social language of the Mennonites.[89] High German became the language of school and church and Low German took over as the language of the family, of the extended family, and in social and business communications, generally.

The Ukrainian and Russian environments enhanced the use of both German languages of the Mennonites because in that context languages and modes of living were clearly correlated. The Mennonites, along with the Lutherans and Catholics, showed little eagerness to adopt the Slavic styles, cultures, and languages of their adopted country. According to one Mennonite linguist, "the economical, intellectual, and ethical standards of the Russo-Ukrainian peasantry were low and seemed even lower to us."[90] The preservation

and cultivation of the Mennonite languages, therefore, became synonymous with self-preservation.

This did not mean that the Ukrainian and Russian languages were completely ignored. On the contrary, a certain degree of russification of the schools had taken place in accordance with the will of the state. And some of those who went beyond the village schools learned the Russian language well and "gradually attained to a true vision of Russian culture, of the Russian mind, and of the Russian soul."[91] But this was less so for the Mennonite masses, who, while bilingual or even trilingual, knew instinctively what the respective languages symbolized. Russian and Ukrainian or a mixture of both were used with their labourers and Slavic neighbours. Official documents and business letters were usually in Russian, sometimes in German. Russian was the language of mental arithmetic and of the barnyard. Horses and sheep knew Russian better than German, and Mennonites, if and when they cursed, tended to do so in Russian, or Low German, a language also suited to irreverence. The language of religion was High German:

> We never prayed in Russian. All our religious services were conducted in High-German. In our Low-German homes grace at table was said in High-German, and even before we entered school we had learned a High-German bedtime prayer by heart.[92]

In Canada, the Russlaender became aware all too quickly that many of the protective boundaries for their way of life had vanished in the resettlement. Gone were the colony, the village, the community organization, and the schools on which they had depended so much. Little could be done about the Canadian scattering and the loss of the traditional defences. But it was still possible to maintain a linguistic and ethnic separateness, mostly by ensuring that the German language was taught and learned.

The retention of the German language was encouraged because it was the mother tongue, because it was so beautiful in its spoken and written forms, and because it was so rich, so expressive, so suited to every thought and emotion.[93] The cultivation of the mother tongue was true to natural law, hence divinely willed. Not to preserve it meant to forfeit one's roots and to cut oneself off from the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual treasures of a people. The assumptions of

the American melting pot were said to be false, because assimilation did not produce a higher society, but rather an inferior one, monotonous and uninteresting, like a garden in which all the flowers were of one kind and one colour.

> What makes the rose so beautiful, the lily so alluring, the violet so refreshing, the hyacinth so gorgeous, and the gladiola so grand? Is it not because all are unique, each is different from the other, and each reflects some of the endless beauty and multiplicity of the creator? Is it not the same in the cultural sphere?[94]

The German language, said its most ardent promoters, was worthy to be preserved for its own sake, for the sake of the culture it represented, for the sake of the preservation of Mennonite ethnicity, and for the sake of the Mennonite faith. Faith could not be deepened, ethnic consciousness could not be strengthened, the fruits of German culture could not be experienced, and the historical heritage could not be appropriated without "the nurture and preservation of the German language."[95] Speaking on the theme of "German and Religion," one elder explained that the two appeared together in the Mennonite home, school, and church because they belonged together as carriers of cherished values. The German language should be preserved, he said, because it was the mother tongue, because two languages were better than one, because German was one of the most important languages of the world, and because Germany was experiencing a renewal which should give all Germans abroad a sense of pride. He wrote:

> Not only do a hundred million people speak this language as their mother tongue, but many strangers make an extraordinary effort to acquire facility in its use, because with the knowledge of the German tongue one can get along in most civilized countries. For this is the language of poets and philosophers![96]

German and religion were the two twin fountains of Mennonite faith.[97] They had become inseparable in the Mennonite school systems both in Russia and in western Canada, where russification and anglicization, respectively, had meant the isolation and close identification of the two most precious elements in the school

curriculum.[98] Moreover, for hundreds of years, the German language had been the religious language of the Mennonite people and for this reason their spiritual growth was intimately tied up with the nurture of it. Loss of the language would mean a substantial loss of the Christian spirit[99] and of the Mennonite faith.[100] It was said:

> We German Mennonites are a religious society. Through the German language a significant stream of religious thought flows through our churches. . . . With the neglect of the German language this stream will cease and our church life will dry up. . . .[101]

Since language was an issue so fundamental to existence and fulfilment,[102] the long-term well-being of a people obviously depended on the preservation of the culture. This called for the cultivation of the German language in family, school, and church; in Sunday school, worship services, musical events, and youth programs; in Saturday schools, high schools, and Bible schools; and through the organization of libraries and societies for the nurture of the German language and literature.[103]

Many and varied were the ideas advanced in the interests of language preservation. Some Mennonites, for instance, expressed once again the traditional view that completely closed and isolated settlements were a must.[104] Others, much less demanding, felt that at least one German periodical in the home was essential.[105] In some communities, locally appointed statisticians kept accurate records of how many people read which papers.[106] The disallowance of the use of English at certain times and in certain places was essential to others.[107] Some felt that the path to successful preservation lay in the retention of the Gothic script, for even in this form lay some of the German essence.[108]

Of considerable prominence in promoting the language were the Canadian-German cultural groups, which in turn were aided by national German agencies. The German-Canadian organization encouraged local German schools and offered prizes to children for outstanding achievements.[109] Outstanding leaders in German-language education were given honourable mention. One of those receiving the silver medal was Professor H.H. Ewert.[110] German societies were organized in some predominantly Mennonite communities including the one at Hague, which was noted for its singing of

Canada's national anthem translated into German.[111] This society had sufficient influence to cause the teaching program in the church to revert back from the English language to German after a transition had already been made.

Teachers and schools had a special role in the nurture of both German and religion.[112] Among the schools serving the immigrants, the Bible schools were commended for their dual role in promoting German and religion. There, students could be trained as convinced German Mennonites.[113] Some insisted that the social language in the Bible schools be exclusively German.[114] A correspondent from the United States, where the language transition was already complete, lent his moral encouragement to the Mennonite school pattern. The nurture of the German language, he said, could stand in second place next to the Bible. Keeping the German language was a condition of life, because the loss of Germanism meant endangering spiritual treasures:

> Hold on to the German in your Bible schools. You'll never be sorry for the price you pay.[115]

Ethnicity and Racial Identity

German language and culture ultimately could not be separated from German ethnic or racial identity, and thus the 1930s also gave rise to an intense and multi-dimensional, though not especially profound, discussion on Mennonite origins and the nature of the Mennonite society. In some ways, the debate was a repeat of the *Hollaenderei* (an excessive emphasis on Dutch origins) in Russia in the Great War period, except now in Canada *Hollaenderei* did not have the upper hand. In Russia, the Mennonite escape from anti-German decrees affecting their property during the war lay in the reassertion of their Frisian origins. In the early Soviet period, the identification by the Mennonites of their citizenship organization as Dutch was also helpful. Now, however, and at least until the war broke out, the German connection was thought to be more advantageous.

The leading proponents of the German ethnic or racial connection were Benjamin Unruh and Walter Quiring, both Russlaender who were writing from Germany at the time. Among their people in Canada, Brazil, and Paraguay, they were opinion leaders, whose

views were published without fail in *Der Bote*, well-received by the readers, and echoed by numerous other writers in Canada, though not by all, for there was much to criticize in what they said.

Benjamin H. Unruh had made his home in Germany towards the end of 1920 after completing a North American visit in search of a new home for the besieged Mennonites in Russia, being one of their four special commissioners to the west.[116] From his central European location, he continued to work as an ambassador-at-large and a spokesman for his people, officially recognized as such and financially supported from Canada by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization.[117]

Unruh discussed at length and with an abundance of words the racial origins of the Russian Mennonites, a subject on which he conducted extensive research, culminating in his publication on the origins in the Dutch and German lowlands of the migrations eastward in the sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.[118] His theories in the 1930s were expounded in three series of extended articles on "origins,"[119] on "fundamentals,"[120] and on "practical questions."[121] It was Unruh's conclusion that the Mennonites undoubtedly belonged to the Germanic races.[122] Many of the early refugees were Germanics who had fled to Prussia in the sixteenth century from the German and Dutch lowlands.[123] Besides, what was now known as the Netherlands belonged at the time to the Hapsburg empire, so that Menno Simons and Martin Luther both had the same emperor. The loss by the empire of both Switzerland and the Netherlands was not an organic separation from Germanic roots but simply poor politics.[124]

In addition to the Mennonites being Germanic in origin, the process of germanization had made them completely German. By 1750, or half a century before the emigration to Russia, Unruh maintained all ministers, with the exception of those in Danzig, had been preaching in German. Thus, the transition from Dutch to Low German, a development known already in the Dutch-German lowlands, and from Low German to High German, at least as far as the official language was concerned, had been completed in West Prussia.[125] And, disregarding completely the *Hollaenderei*, Unruh claimed that in Russia the Mennonites had become confirmed Germans, especially during the Great War and the revolution.[126]

Walter Quiring was also a native of Russia, who had made his

home in Germany, first for studies and then for professional pursuits. Quiring graduated with his doctorate from Munich in 1927 and spent the next dozen years in education and cultural activities. The latter took him to the Americas on several occasions, resulting in the writing and publication of two books on the Russo-Germans in Latin America.[127] Both titles identified the Mennonites as ethnic or racial Germans, a basic premise in most of Quiring's writings in the 1930s.[128] When later he immigrated to Canada, he became editor of *Der Bote*, the paper in which his articles appeared.

Quiring's main concerns were to prove that the Mennonites were ethnic Germans, and that the Mennonites, therefore, should feel themselves a part of the great German people. For the purpose of the former argument he, like Unruh, made much of the fact that Mennonites had never been Dutch in the political sense,[129] that they had never really been acquainted with the Dutch language and literature,[130] and that, even if there was some ethnic Dutch residue in the Mennonites, the Dutch were but a branch of the Germanic race.[131] On the other hand, following the emigration from the Netherlands, the Mennonites in Prussia participated in the process of germanization, in both a cultural and a racial way, rather readily, so that good foundations were laid for the pure German development of the churches in Russia.[132] Hence the following conclusion:

> The Mennonites from Russia are Germans, German according to their blood, German according to their language, German according to their essence and customs, and most of them are German also in the innermost parts of their heart.[133]

Quiring's theories about Mennonite racial identification were supported not only by his interpretation of the Mennonite historical and sociological development, but also by the doctrine of the blood.[134] This doctrine was not a German invention, although the Germans were the first to make "the sensible demand" that the future be determined by this doctrine. Its basis was God's order in creation, by which humanity was organized into certain families according to blood types which should not be mixed.[135] That is why Germans could not marry Jews or Indians, for the blood types of the latter were different from the blood of the German race, as were also the blood types of the lion, the dog, and the frog, although admittedly the distances between them were of varying degrees.[136] Mixing, it was

indicated, had disastrous racial, cultural, and spiritual consequences. To avoid such tragedy it was desirable and necessary to determine one's racial ancestry and to remain loyal to it.[137] German racial identity could be assumed or claimed as long as a link could be traced back to one generation born in Germany.[138] The ancestors, it was pointed out, continued to live on even in one drop of blood or in one cell of the brain.[139]

Cultural qualities, it was asserted also by others, were biologically determined and conditioned.[140] And if there was a biological base for cultural and racial identities, then obviously there was also theological support for this position, for what was found to be biologically true was in accordance with the order of God. Thus, cultural and racial Germanism found its rationale in a biological theory about human blood, which, in turn, became a theological doctrine of race. Both biology and theology taught that God had ordained the division of the human family into racial groups and that mixing these groups was degenerating, physically and also spiritually. The greater the distance between blood types the more harmful the effect of mixing the types. God made the white race and God made the black race but the mixed breeds came from the devil.[141]

If, then, the racial order was according to divine plan and purpose, it was of utmost importance that the racial identity of the Mennonite people be firmly established and properly claimed. This was no easy matter since at certain times in history the Mennonites had identified themselves as *Hollaender* (Dutchmen) and at other times as Germans. In the 1931 Canadian census, about 60 per cent of all Canadian Mennonites had given their race as Dutch, according to one correspondent.[142] Another claimed that the identification with the Dutch ran as high as 90 per cent.[143]

The actual figures for Dutch identification in 1931 were 42 per cent compared to 35 per cent for the German identification (see Table 35). These figures changed dramatically when Canada was once again at war with Germany. Fifty-eight per cent of Canadian Mennonites gave their racial origin as Dutch in 1941, whereas only 28 per cent claimed German origin.

Whatever the figures, *Hollaenderei* or identification with the Dutch had been a mistake, it was maintained. It had not helped the cause in Russia, or in Canada, or in Germany. Whenever the Mennonites had been in need, not the Dutch but the Germans had recognized their brethren of similar flesh and blood.[144] In this

TABLE 35

RACIAL IDENTIFICATION OF CANADIAN MENNONITES IN THE CENSUS YEARS 1931, 1941

	1931		1941	
RACIAL ORIGIN	NUMBER	PER CENT	NUMBER	PER CENT
British	2,863	3.226	4,575	4.108
French	243	.274	891	.800
Austrian	452	.509	924	.830
Czechoslovakian	8	.009	24	.022
Finnish	1	.001	8	.007
German	34,687	39.090	31,465	28.250
Hungarian	2	.002	56	.050
Italian	18	.020	9	.008
Jewish	11	.012	4	.004
Dutch	37,555	42.322	64,934	58.300
Polish	134	.151	265	.238
Russian	12,084	13.618	7,204	6.468
Scandinavian	212	.239	203	.182
Ukrainian	385	.434	657	.590
Other European	36	.041	87	.078
Chinese	–	–	7	.006
Japanese	–	–	–	–
Other Asian	15	.017	9	.008
Indian or Eskimo	2	.002	–	–
Others	28	.032	58	.052
Total	88,736	100	111,380	100

assertion, too, there was historical inaccuracy, because of all the national Mennonite communities the Dutch had most distinguished themselves in the area of relief for their needy brethren over the longest period of time.

The identification of Mennonites as Germans and the primacy of ethnic, rather than religious, qualities[145] met with some opposition in the Russlaender communities. First of all, the critics argued that the germanization of the Mennonites had not proceeded nearly as easily, quickly, and completely as the Germanists suggested. For 200 years,

the Mennonites of Prussia had maintained their contacts with Holland, as could be proved by correspondence filed in the archives of Amsterdam.[146] Even the church creeds brought from Prussia to Russia in a poor translation reflected the Dutch background.[147] Not only had germanization come recently and only partially, but there were many names reflecting non-Germanic elements—names of Czech, Dutch, French, Moravian, Polish, and Slavic origin—names like DeFehr, Delesky, Koslovsky, Ratzlaff, Rogalsky, Sawatsky, Selevsky, and Spenst.[148] And even if Mennonites were German Mennonites, it was made clear that they were not Mennonite Germans.[149]

Further evidence that Mennonites were more than a single race was provided by the international Mennonite conference held in Saskatchewan in 1938. The delegates and visitors came from all races and tongues and nations. The Dutch, the German, the Swiss, the American, and the Canadian cultures and races were represented, as were also the American Indian Mennonites. Under normal conditions, the Chinese and Hindu Mennonite Christians would also have been represented. All of these were Mennonites, Johann G. Rempel argued. At least, he added somewhat apologetically, they were Mennonites if the religious characteristic was the consideration.[150] The apologetic "ifs" and "buts" were not uncommon among those who wrote to question or counter strong pro-German expressions.

Other writers also objected vigorously to the idea that Mennonites were more of a *Volk* than a church. The focal point of Mennonite life, they said, was faith and religion.[151] Not the race but the spirit was the most important essence of the Mennonite people.[152] In Canada, the Mennonites were a religious fellowship. They might speak German but they were religious and their economic and political loyalties were to Canada.[153] Among them was Cornelius Krahn, who like Walter Quiring had come to Germany from Russia to complete doctoral studies, and who had then joined the faculty at Bethel College, where he proceeded to build up an archives and a historical library. He, too, was an opinion leader among the Russlaender, though less vocal than either Unruh or Quiring. He emphasized religion as a more fundamental principle of Mennonite historical development than culture.[154] Not blood but faith had brought the Mennonite forefathers together from all kinds of racial backgrounds.[155]

The contributions of Jacob H. Janzen, "teacher, preacher, elder, and author, a man of rare gifts and rich understanding,"[156] are of special interest because of his leadership in the immigrant community at various levels. As a literary man, Janzen expressed strong appreciation for German culture. "We are good Germans," he said, "because our culture is German and because we have learned to understand and appreciate best and most of all the beauty and depth of the German language and with it the depth of the German soul."[157] To Janzen, German virtue and character were the most valuable ingredients of the Mennonite ethnic and cultural heritage.[158] He issued urgent appeals to the immigrants to nurture the language, not only for the sake of the language but also for the sake of the total German cultural treasure.[159]

Janzen identified the immigrants as German ethnics[160] and as carriers of German culture and values,[161] but he also insisted that germanization had taken place only in Russia. The articles of faith brought along from Prussia, he said, had been only a very poor translation with strong Dutch overtones.[162] He also emphasized that Mennonites were first and foremost a religious society and not a *Volk*. The concept of a *Mennovolk*, he said, had first arisen in Russia and could not be viewed as fundamental or normative.[163]

In summing up the foregoing, it can be said that there were various degrees of, and motives for, the Germanism that was being promoted. Some germanizers were primarily lovers of the German language and its treasures and did not want to see something so valuable lost. Others, equally zealous, believed that bilingualism or trilingualism was better than unilingualism. Still others were certain that the maintenance of the German language was essential for the keeping of some distance from the world. Perhaps the vast majority had long ago become so habituated to the automatic twinning of religion and language, Mennonitism and Germanism, that their inclinations towards Germanism were as natural and predictable as was their love of land and learning.

The endorsement among the Russlaender of ethnic or racial Germanism was less universal, partly because of the uncertainty about origins and partly because of the primacy accorded to the religious and Christian nature of the Mennonite society. Jacob H. Janzen probably spoke for most of the Russlaender church leaders when he insisted that every religious soul needed a cultural body to

carry it, and while he praised the attributes of German culture and ethnicity, he also insisted that all of this was secondary to the religious consideration. There was a more definite parting of the ways when ethnicity was dished up in the form of German racism or when, as will later be seen, the love of German culture and peoplehood was followed by a promotion of the German Reich and its political program.

The Dialects and Popular Culture

The cultural identities and borders of the Mennonites were determined not only by geography, nonconformity, High German philology, and ethnicity but also by two dialects, the contribution of which to Mennonite isolation and self-preservation may not be overlooked. The two were Pennsylvania German, spoken among the Swiss, and Low German, spoken among the Dutch. Both dialects served the function of popular social communication; both were better carriers of Mennonite humour than either High German or English; and both, but particularly Low German, gave rise to a special kind of Mennonite literature. Pennsylvania German culture, on the other hand, embraced cultural forms other than literature or language, such as Fraktur art and decorative painting.[164]

The Pennsylvania German language was living on despite predictions already in the nineteenth century that its death was imminent.[165] Also known as Pennsylvania Dutch, owing to a careless but understandable transliteration of Pennsylvania *Deutsch* (meaning German but sounding more like Dutch), Pennsylvania German was actually a shared language. It was common to a great number of people in Pennsylvania, who had brought a Germanic dialect with them, which in time had been adapted to the New World through the incorporation of new concepts and also convenient terms and usages from the English language. Catholic, Lutheran, and Mennonite immigrants to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania brought with them the same dialect, and when their distant cousins, like the Mennonite Amish, arrived directly from Europe, the community of those capable of using the dialect was enlarged.

Apart from the happy relationships with Catholics and Lutherans which the dialect helped to facilitate, Pennsylvania German was another source of isolation and insulation for the Mennonites.

Coupled with their rural and nonconformed life style and their nonresistant religious outlook, the dialect was a formidable contribution to boundary maintenance. Yet, it was not a sacred language in the sense that it could serve liturgical functions. Pennsylvania German expressions would find their way into sermons, but prayers, Bible readings, and official church acts could never be corrupted by Pennsylvania German.[166]

By contrast, the dialect helped to change a rather austere people, doleful in appearance, into one actually characterized in everyday life by a great deal of gaiety and laughter. The dialect itself is filled with humorous expressions. As one linguist, once an Ontario Old Order Mennonite, has written:

> A few years ago, my father, who is almost 76, followed my brother and me around the golf course. My father had never been on a golf course, but he was eager for the exercise, the outdoors, and the fellowship. We, of course, spoke the dialect and for the first time I discovered how humorous the game of golf could be. I listened closely to his many original descriptions and observations. I realized, perhaps more than ever, that the dialect can be very expressive and that it is filled with humorous words, idioms, and other linguistic constructions.[167]

The Low German dialect originated in the northern Dutch and German lowlands, whereas Pennsylvania German had southern German origins. While Low German or *Plattdeutsch*, like Pennsylvania German, was not exclusively a Mennonite language, at least in Canada as in southern Russia it was spoken almost exclusively by the Dutch Mennonites.[168] Kanadier used and cultivated it more readily than did the Russlaender. The latter had come to view Low German as a language too low and uncultured to pass on to their children. The new principal at the Gretna collegiate, for instance, conducted a virtual crusade against the use of Low German by the students, believing as he did that it was an obstacle to the mastery and preservation of High German.[169]

There were important exceptions to that rule and these, ironically, included Mennonite literary figures, whose works in the High German language were reputable in themselves. They were Jacob H. Janzen in Ontario and Arnold Dyck in Manitoba, who distinguished themselves not only as men of letters in their own right but also as

promoters of the art on behalf of all Mennonite writers.[170] Dyck, in particular, produced a monthly magazine for the promotion of Mennonite literature and culture. The *Mennonitische Volkswarte* was bilingual in the sense of using both the High German and the Low German language, the latter particularly for short stories, poetry, and drama.

The paradox of two gifted Russlaender writers in High German turning to Low German was explained, however indirectly, by Jacob H. Janzen himself when he wrote about "the literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites" in 1935.[171] "Mennonitism had never been a fertile ground for belles-lettres," he said, pointing out that already three centuries previous "the most outstanding writer in Holland, Joost von den Vondel, felt impelled to leave the Mennonites (1645), so that his talents would not be hindered in their development."

This did not mean that Mennonites were unfavourable to all literature or to all good books. Some, like the writings of Menno Simons, were purchased—Janzen spoke tongue-in-cheek as he was wont to do—"to become dust-covered on the 'corner shelf.' " And Mennonites loved "good" stories, but Mennonitism itself "was regarded in certain respects as a 'terra sancta,' on which the jugglery of belles-lettres dared not appear . . . [writing] in this genre was simply sin." Janzen's observations were based on personal experience:

> . . . when I came to Canada and in my broken English tried to make plain to a Mennonite bishop that I was a "novelist" (that being the translation for "*Schriftsteller*" in my dictionary) he was much surprised. He then tried to make plain to me that novelists were fiction writers and that fiction was a lie. I surely would not want to represent myself to him as a professional liar.[172]

There were other writers in the community, in both Russia and Canada, Janzen went on to explain, who experienced a certain ostracism, if not in social terms then in economic terms—they just couldn't make a living. But Low German drama and stories were something else because they tended to be funny, and since they appeared in the non-official, non-religious language of the Mennonites, they did not come under quite the same judgement.[173] Thus, Janzen had experienced a breaking of the ice with his two Low German dramas, *De Bildung* and *Utwaundre*, through which he and

all Russlaender discovered that they could treat serious themes like education and emigration humorously and in so doing even laugh at themselves.[174]

Arnold Dyck settled down in Steinbach, where he became editor of the *Steinbach Post* and where he continued what Janzen had begun but could not continue if only for the reason that his roles as bishop, leader, and writer of "official" literature took up all of his time. It was in the *Post* where Arnold Dyck tried out his beloved *Plautdietsch* on his mostly Kanadier readers. His "*Belauschte Gespraeche*" were unpretentious humorous conversations among typical Mennonite farmers.[175] In these writings, Dyck became one of the very few Russlaender who built bridges to the Kanadier and who earned the "right" to be the editor of their paper. When in 1936 he left the *Post* to devote himself full-time to the newly founded illustrated monthly *Warte*, not only did he publish short stories, poems, articles on Mennonite life and history, and first printings of historical documents but also "every little nook was filled with charming Low German nursery rhymes." The *Warte* was an ambitious undertaking and did not survive the depression as a monthly magazine, but Dyck constantly found new channels for his activity, including a remembrance of Russia in his fictional *Verloren in der Steppe* (Lost in the Steppes).

His real genius was established as a Low German stylist, for what he "accomplished with our Cinderella dialect is amazing."[176] The plain language of the plain Mennonite farmer he captured the best in his creation of two characters, Koop and Bua (Buhr), who came brilliantly alive in their travels in a Model T Ford in *Koop enn Bua op Reise*, including a trip to Toronto (*Koop enn Bua faore nao Toronto*). As far as his readers were concerned, Koop and Bua could have been on the road forever. His books were nearly all light in tone. In the words of Gerhard Wiens:

> His books are full of laughter of many kinds. There is pungent satire and fine irony, rollicking jocularity, farce and buffoonery with gusto and brilliant clowning, devastating caricature, roguish merriment, and sprightly whimsicality, and instance after instance of "Situationskomisk."[177]

Mennonites laughing at themselves has not been documented, apart from the likes of Janzen and Dyck, but that there was plenty of

it in the social circles relatively distanced from the all-encompassing seriousness of the church of the martyrs can be attested to by anybody whose family memory goes back to the usage of either the Low German or the Pennyslvania German dialect. Gradually, the Mennonites learned to translate their humour into the English language with the dramatizations of such pioneering experiences as "the trail of the Conestoga." And Paul Hiebert, the Manitoba chemistry professor of Mennonite background, led the Dutch in this transition. His classroom doodlings in the 1930s were becoming *Sarah Binks*, a satire on literary criticism that one day would be a classic. The struggle for survival, however, circumscribed laughter for everybody in the years of depression and war, and particularly for Mennonites. They were very serious when they faced the world and the prospect of war.

FOOTNOTES

1 Editorial, "The Elmira Special Conference," *Church and Mission News* 8 (November 1943):4.

2 A.J. Schellenberg, "Die zweite Provinziale-Vertreterversammlung in Herbert, Saskatchewan, am 16. und 17. Juli 1930," *Der Bote* 7 (1 October 1930):3.

3 Johann Rempel, "Bericht des Aufklaerungskomitees," *Jahrbuch*, 1931, pp. 76–77.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Published in 1941, *The Story of the Mennonites*, a revised edition of an earlier work (1920), became the last of Smith's works. He died in 1948, at which time Harold S. Bender gave the following assessment: "Dr. Smith was unquestionably the greatest of the historians produced by the Mennonites of America and the peer of any of the European Mennonite historians. With his five major works written over a period of thirty-five years, he published more full-length historical works than any other Mennonite historian. His particular gift was that of synthesis of masses of material into well-written, interesting, integrated accounts. He was pre-eminently the general Mennonite historian who took the great sweep of our history in both Europe and America and put it into clear, easily read volumes that will remain standard works for years to come." See Robert Kreider, "Foreword," in C. Henry Smith, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1981).

6 H.H. Ewert, "The Mennonites" (a paper delivered before the membership of the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, 1932).

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 12.
8 S.F. Coffman, "The Adventure of Faith," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 14 (1926):228-33. Coffman's presentation was given before Ewert's, but it was not as comprehensive in its scope nor was it as widely circulated.
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16 Quoted as a motto in John S. Weber, "History of S.F. Coffman (1872-1954)" (research paper, University of Waterloo, 1975). See introductory pages and also pp. 150-51.
17 *Jahrbuch*, 1933, p. 14; *Jahrbuch*, 1937, p. 21. See also B. Schellenberg, "Das mennonitische Archiv," *Mennonitische Volkswarte* 1 (January 1935):97-101.
18 B. Schellenberg, "Das mennonitische Archiv," *Jahrbuch*, 1933, pp. 78-83.
19 Allan G. Felstead, *A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Sectarian Divisions in the Mennonite Church of Waterloo County, 1849-1939* (M.A. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1978), p. 71.
20 Paul Knowles, "New Mennonite to Non-Mennonite: A Study in Assimilation" (research paper, University of Waterloo, 1979).
21 Everek R. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church* (Elkhart, Ind.: Bethel Publishing Company, 1958), p. 31.
22 *Ibid.*
23 Paul Knowles, "New Mennonite to Non-Mennonite: A Study in Assimilation."
24 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9, 11-12; J.A. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church* (New Carlisle, Ohio: The Bethel Publishing Company, 1920), pp. 145-48, 161-65; Everek R. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, pp. 219-32.
25 *Journal*, 1940, pp. 1-59 illustrate this point rather well.
26 *Ibid.*
27 Everek R. Storms, p. 70.
28 John C. Wenger, "The History of Non-Conformity in the Mennonite Church," *Proceedings* of the third *Annual Conference on Mennonite Cultural Problems*, 1944, pp. 41-52.
29 Edward Yoder, "The Need for Nonconformity Today," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 11 (April 1937):131-41.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 132–33.
31 *Ibid.*, pp. 133–34.
32 *Ibid.*, pp. 134–35.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
36 *Ibid.*, pp. 139–40.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
38 *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 141.
39 M.C. Lehman, "Bible Teaching on Non-Conformity: The Meaning of Non-Conformity as Implied by the Christian View of God, Man, and the World," *Gospel Herald* 32 (4 May 1939):98. See also T.E. Schrock, "Teachings in Our Non-Conformity Program," *Gospel Herald* 29 (5 November 1936):675–76.
40 Henry Stauffer, "The Mennonite Conscience and the World," *The Mennonite* 54 (12 September 1939):7–8.
41 *Ibid.*
42 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
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44 Edward Yoder, p. 137.
45 "Old-fashioned Mennonitism: Christian Apparel," *Gospel Herald* 32 (28 September 1939):545.
46 *Ibid.*
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48 J.L. Stauffer, "Bible Teaching and Non-Conformity: As Applied to Proper and Improper Apparel," *Gospel Herald* 32 (29 June 1939):258–59.
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50 *Ibid.*
51 *Ibid.*
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65 "The Elmira Special Conference," *Church and Mission News* 8 (November 1943):1, 4.
66 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
67 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 4.
68 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
69 "Special Session of General Conference," *Church and Mission News* 9 (July 1944):1.
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99 P.A. Rempel, "Warum wir die Gemeinschaftsschulen brauchen," *Der Bote* 9 (12 August 1931):2–3; Hermann Janzen, "Kettenbrief," *Der Bote* 14 (16 February 1938):5.

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102 Oskar Hamm, "Wie—?" *Der Bote* 13 (8 January 1936):3.

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106 Is. Is. Regehr, "Die Vertreterversammlung in Alberta," *Der Bote* 12 (18 September 1935):5.

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123 B.H. Unruh, "Zur wissenschaftlichen Klaerung der Herkunft des ruszlanddeutschen Mennonitentums," *Der Bote* 15 (6 July 1938):5.
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126 B.H. Unruh, "Praktische Fragen," *Der Bote* 14 (26 May 1937):1–2.
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131 *Ibid.*
132 *Ibid.*
133 *Ibid.*
134 Walter Quiring, "Artfremdes Blut ist Gift," *Der Bote* 13 (15 April 1936):2–3.
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169 From the author's own experience.

170 Arnold Dyck, "Ein Geleitwort vom Herausgeher," *Mennonitische Volkswarte* 1 (January 1935):1–2; Jacob H. Janzen, "Die Belletristik der Canadischen Ruszlanddeutschen Mennoniten," *Warte-Jahrbuch* 1943, pp. 83–89.

171 Jacob H. Janzen, "The Literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites," *Mennonite Life* 1 (January 1946):22–25, 28. See also J. Thiessen, "Mennonite Literature in Canada," *Mennonite Mirror* 2 (November 1972):13–16; George K. Epp and Heinrich Wiebe,

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172 Jacob H. Janzen, p. 22.

173 See Gerhard Wiens, "Arnold Dyck at Seventy," *Mennonite Life* 14 (April 1959):81-82.

174 *Ibid.* Peter Paetkau, "Low German Drama Study," *Mennonite Life* 33 (December 1978):27-28.

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177 *Ibid.* For other assessments of Arnold Dyck, see: Mary Regehr Dueck, "Arnold Dyck: Non-Conformist," *Mennonite Life* 30 (December 1975):20-24; Von Kurt Kauenhoven, "Arnold Dyck, ein Blick auf sein Schaffen," *Mennonite Life* 4 (April 1959):89-90, 95; N.J. Klassen, "Arnold Dyck: An Appreciation," *Mennonite Life* 26 (April 1971):59; Warren Kliewer, "Arnold Dyck as a Literary Artist," *Mennonite Life* 14 (April 1959):85-87; Hedwig Knoop, "Arnold Dyck—At the End of the Road," *Mennonite Life* 26 (April 1971):56-58; Elisabeth Peters, "The Popularity of Dyck's Writings," *Mennonite Life* 14 (April 1959):87-88; "A Tribute to Arnold Dyck," *Mennonite Life* 24 (January 1969):3-5; "Arnold Dyck—Our Last Visit," *Mennonite Life* 26 (April 1971):54-55; Elmer F. Suderman, "Arnold Dyck Explains the Origin of Low German," *Mennonite Life* 24 (January 1969):5-7; "The Comic Spirit of Arnold Dyck," *Mennonite Life* 24 (October 1969):169-70; Jack Thiessen, "Arnold Dyck—The Mennonite Artist," *Mennonite Life* 24 (April 1969):77-83; Gerhard Wiens, "Arnold Dyck in Translation," *Mennonite Mirror* 3 (March 1974):7-8.