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MENNONITE BRETHREN AND GENERAL CONFERENCE THEOLOGY -  
A COMMON CENTER, A SINGLE FOUNDATION

Introduction

How does one approach a topic as broad and provocative as Canadian M.B. - G.C. theology? Neither Mennonite group has developed a systematic theology, though both have a strong emphasis on Biblical theology. Both claim to belong to a non-creedal tradition yet at the same time both uphold certain confessional statements. Both groups score high on general orthodoxy as revealed in the Kauffman-Harder study.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous questions come to mind in considering our topic. For example, how normative are confessions such as that of Cornelius Ris (written in 1762 and accepted as the unofficial confession of the General Conference church in 1902), or the Souderton Statement (adopted by the General Conference church at Souderton, Pa. in 1941 and by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1965), or the M.B. Confession of Faith (first adopted in 1902 and then again, in revised form in 1975)? To what extent has Fundamentalism shaped both M.B. and G.C. theology? Are there such differences in belief and practice within each brotherhood that it is extremely difficult to characterize either group as holding to a common doctrinal core? Is there a need to develop a more explicit theology in the context of the issues and challenges facing Canadian M.B.'s and G.C.'s in the closing decades of this century?

The whole question of how M.B.'s and G.C.'s define themselves theologically is a crucial one. The title of this paper suggests what I hope is true, i.e. both groups have (ought to have) a centered set understanding of their theology and of each other as brothers and sisters loving and serving a common Lord.

Paul Hiebert has described how people construct differing mental categories to match their differing perceptions of reality.<sup>2</sup> One construct is to draw clear boundaries based on those attributes which have the same intrinsic characteristics, which in fact become definitive characteristics. This produces a bounded set which clearly separates certain concepts and ideas from other concepts and ideas.

The English language uses bounded sets for most of its nouns. In creating a bounded set, we think of a set of things which share common characteristics. "Apples" are defined by clear boundaries - i.e. they are a kind of fruit, they are firm and somewhat round, they are fleshy, etc. "Bananas" do not meet these boundary requirements and are not in the set "apples". Bounded set thinking stresses whether an object is "in" or "out" according to prior established criteria.

When we define "Christian" from within the conceptual framework of bounded set thinking we usually apply tests of right belief (i.e. essential doctrines), and right behavior (i.e. one does not drink or smoke). All Christians are viewed as essentially the same. Each one crossed the boundary between being a "non-Christian" to being a "Christian" (and acquiring the defining characteristics) via a single event - conversion.

Another model is that of the centered set where there is a boundary, but the set is determined by the center. We think in terms of movement toward the center. Particles of iron being drawn to a magnet is an example of a centered set.

Centered set thinking focuses on the center and the boundary emerges 1.) when the center is clearly defined 2.) when the movement of objects is clearly perceived. While there is a clear distinction between things moving in and those moving out, the objects within the centered set are not uniform, some being nearer the center than others.

Defining "Christian" from within a centered set conceptual framework would 1.) make Christ the center 2.) a Christian one who has been converted, i.e. he has left another center and is now moving towards knowing and following Christ 3.) allow for Christians to be at different stages in their pilgrimage of knowing and following Christ. As Christians are moving toward the center, they will also be moving closer in their relation to each other.

There are certain doctrinal norms which are basic to the Christian faith and certain boundaries will always need to be maintained. Disagreement over which issues form the boundary (and thus necessitate division) as well as lack of clarity as to the nature of the center has plagued the history of the church from its very beginning. The discussions at Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15:1-35 provide a classic study of centered/bounded set theologizing.

Differences of opinion between M.B.'s and G.C.'s regarding theological issues will likely continue but hopefully a bounded set mentality will not characterize relations between the two groups as it has in the past. With Frances Hiebert we recognize that "boundary establishment is not unimportant. It is the degree of emphasis on either the center or the boundaries that determines whether a group has a centered set or a bounded set conceptual orientation."<sup>3</sup>

The thrust of this paper will be to affirm for M.B. and G.C. theology a Single Foundation, Christ (I Cor. 3:11) and a common center, His body, the church, through which the manifold wisdom of God is to be revealed (Eph. 3:10). A thoroughly biblical Christology and ecclesiology form the focal point of Mennonite theology. As M.B.'s and G.C.'s see each other sincerely moving toward a faithful expression in thought and practice of this common center they will experience a greater sense of unity and love.

We have already heard reflections on M.B. - G.C. relations pre World War I. The post W.W.I period in Canada up to 1945 was characterized in both groups by the formation of new congregations and expansion of conference agencies. This was also the period of the rapid growth in Canada of the Bible school movement, with more than thirty such institutions being formed by the two Mennonite groups.<sup>4</sup> Even though Bible schools were viewed as bastions of the faith, this did not stop a growing accommodation by both groups to North American environment in language, religious patterns, and life-style.<sup>5</sup>

The post World War II period was a time in which both M.B.'s and G.C.'s in Canada faced new challenges brought on by urbanization and social disorder and both groups faced a serious questioning by many of its members of traditional Mennonite thinking about God, the world, and the role of the church in society.

The 1960's - 1980's period was also a time of Anabaptist reorientation. In the Kauffman-Harder survey measuring Anabaptism, M.B.'s scored second only to

the (Old) Mennonite Church, ranking higher than the G.C.'s. One might ask with John Redekop, since M.B.'s are relatively strong supporters of Anabaptism, why are they so often reluctant to cooperate with other Anabaptists?<sup>6</sup> A prime example of this latter point was the M.B. reluctance to become cooperative users of the Foundation Series and an unwillingness to adopt that curriculum as the official conference curriculum.

One might add that alongside the movement of Anabaptist reorientation there has also been a reaction to the Anabaptist emphasis by many in both M.B. and G.C. circles. M.B.'s scored very high in the Kauffman-Harder evaluation of Fundamentalist Orthodoxy. This measurement may well accurately reflect Fundamentalist inroads but the criteria of Fundamentalism in the survey were inadequate, failing to measure traits such as militant patriotism, dispensationalism and ethical legalism.<sup>7</sup>

The first section of this paper will present a brief overview of the M.B.-G.C. creedal and confessional tradition, affirming that Mennonites are not as non-creedal as has so often been said nor are they lacking in expressing their doctrinal distinctives in confessions of faith. The second section will argue for the necessity of developing a more explicit M.B.-G.C. theology which interprets and applies Biblical doctrine within the context of present-day social, economic, and ethical issues. Some cautions and guidelines for such theologizing will be suggested. The paper will then focus on common distinctives and trends as well as differences in M.B.-G.C. theology and conclude with a plea for centered-set thinking which will allow for a greater sense of M.B.-G.C. unity and co-operation in the work of the kingdom. The co-operative efforts of British Columbia M.B.'s and G.C.'s in the work of Columbia Bible Institute will be cited as an example of what can happen when two Mennonite groups take seriously the implications of "a common center, a single foundation" motif.

#### 1. M.B. and G.C. Creeds and Confessions

Both J.A. Toews and Samuel Pannabecker downplay the role of creeds and confessions in their respective histories of the Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite Church. Toews states:

Like their early Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers, the Mennonite Brethren were biblicists with a kind of intuitive apprehension about creeds and confessions. Hence they have never attached as much weight to them as many other denominations have.<sup>8</sup>

Pannabecker affirms that the General Conference Church "began with no creed,

and to this day no creed has been formally adopted"<sup>9</sup>- a statement which must be seriously questioned. The Mennonite Encyclopedia suggests that the 1941 Souderton Statement was a doctrinal statement officially adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church and although it is not called a confession of faith, it in effect is one, reflecting the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.<sup>10</sup> Pannabecker insists that both the Confession of Cornelius Ris and the Souderton Statement have served practical purposes, but "cannot be regarded as creedal statements". He adds: "As a matter of fact, the General Conference has not been too much concerned about precise statements of faith or their elaboration."<sup>11</sup>

It is not within the scope of this paper to do a full-scale survey of Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith. Howard Loewen in his excellent presentation at the October, 1982 conference on Mennonite Pluralism held at Fresno produced an overview of Mennonite Confessions of Faith in America (now published in abridged form in The Mennonite Quarterly Review). Loewen shows rather conclusively that Mennonites do have a common confessional family that has a comparatively consistent, confessional focus. The center of Mennonite confessions revolves around the three-fold axis of Christology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology, "where Christ is the Foundation, the Church is the Center, and the Consummation is the Hope - a theology of redemption, a theology of church, and a theology of hope."<sup>12</sup> Loewen affirmed that recognizing the One Lord, One Church, One Hope center and focus provides a basis for a more vigorous systematic theological reflection and can in turn contribute to a greater sense of unity and identity in the Mennonite fellowships.<sup>13</sup>

Although M.B.'s and G.C.'s do not allow any creed to be the final authority in adjudicating theological matters as do the creeds and confessions of the mainline Protestant churches, both Mennonite groups do accept the great ecumenical statements of the church universal. The Worship Hymnal of the Mennonite Brethren Church includes in its "Aids to Worship" three creeds: excerpts from the Writings of John, the Apostles' Creed, and a Contemporary Affirmation. Prayers are drawn from St. Chrysostum, the Gregorian Sacramentary, and St. Francis of Assisi. The General Conference Mennonite Hymnal includes four affirmations of faith, the aforementioned three and the fourth, the Nicene Creed. Thus both groups in their liturgy acknowledge a confessional unity with the church universal.

Although Anabaptist theology did not root itself in creeds but in the Scriptures and in a Christ-like life, our forebears did produce a large number of confessions, "not as instruments to which the laity or ministry subscribed ex

anima, but as instructional tools for the indoctrination of their young people and as witnesses to their faith for distribution in society or as a means of better understanding between differing groups."<sup>14</sup>

There was a proliferation of Dutch confessions of faith between 1615 and 1665, many of which were written to heal the many schisms among Dutch Mennonites and to unite the brotherhood on the basis of commonly accepted statements of faith. As is the case in the prefaces of modern Mennonite confessional statements, the early Dutch confessions repeatedly affirmed that only the Scriptures themselves were normative and that the confessions were "subject to the Word of God" and "subject to improvement".<sup>15</sup>

In a sense Mennonites are confessional much like other Protestant traditions in that they have clearly spelled out their doctrinal distinctives as over against other denominations. In many cases the Mennonite confessions have proven divisive. After 1665 no new confessions were produced in Holland for about a century. Thereafter "the confessions were either the expression of the hardened holding fast by single schismatic groups to their separatistic positions . . . or of an attempt to stem the growing tide of liberalism, such as the irenic confession prepared by Corneluis Ris in 1762 (published in 1766)."<sup>16</sup>

In light of the tendency of confessional statements to be divisive, Loewen observes "there is a sense in which Mennonites need to be more creedal in the classical sense of that term, where our confessional orientation focuses on unity rather than division." He adds: "Perhaps we have been too rigorously confessional and not sufficiently creedal, not in the sense of giving the ecumenical creeds a greater normativity in our theologizing, but in the sense of developing a confessional theology that needs to be less sectarian or denominationally oriented, and that gives that tradition an ethos that is broader rather than narrower in scope."<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Implicit and Explicit Theology

In his 1973 book The Theology of Anabaptism Robert Friedmann asserts that the Anabaptist's considered theology as a system a stumbling block to discipleship and no real help in man's earthly predicament.<sup>18</sup> He states that there is a great deal of implicit theology in the New Testament and he contrasts Jesus and Paul - the former with an implied theology shining through his parables and homilies; the latter beginning to shape theological systems. Jesus' approach is held up as the model.

Friedmann uses the word "existential" as distinct from "systematic" to describe Anabaptist theology - another example of how scholars so often superimpose a philosophical, historical grid over their material (or the Scriptures), thus reshaping meanings to conform to their grid. Quoting Kierkegaard, Friedmann affirms that an existential system is impossible and that "a theological system cannot be existential, and existential Christianity cannot be pressed into a theological system."<sup>19</sup> He makes the rather amazing claim: "Ever since the days of the apostolic church, Anabaptism is the only example in church history of an existential Christianity where there existed no basic split between faith and life."<sup>20</sup> This uniformity of faith and life is one of Friedmann's definitions of "existential".

I would affirm that there is no need to choose between the methodology of Jesus and that of Paul. Implicit theology does not cancel out the need for explicit or systematic theology. A. James Reimer states it well in his article entitled "The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology":

I can see nothing intrinsically contradictory between a systematic or explicit theology and an implicit, existential or prophetic - eschatological theology. I strongly believe Mennonites must develop an explicit theology which will reflect the implicit theology that they have had all along, and that precisely such an explicit systematic theology will push Mennonites to place their strong historical-ethical concerns within a larger and sounder theological context . . . For some of us it is absolutely imperative if we want to remain both Mennonite and Christian that we systematically bring together our inherited Christian beliefs with the critical questions and insights we encounter in the various disciplines and in the cultural matrix of the modern world.<sup>21</sup>

It might be said not only of Mennonite theology, but of conservative theology in general that fresh, innovative work is lacking. There are some excellent studies in Biblical exegesis being done and some good treatises out on Christian doctrine, but theology goes beyond this to apply sound exegesis and extend and elaborate doctrine. As David Wells observes:

Theology should be concerned to organize doctrines, explore their relations, expose their problems, defend their teaching, relate their content to other fields of knowledge and apply their conclusions to each age in a philosophical and cultural vernacular native to it.<sup>22</sup>

The task of Mennonite theology must be in part to explore the modern situation and develop ways of applying Biblical doctrine redemptively to it. Doctrine never changes but theology, which interprets and applies it does.

There is a lag in Mennonite thinking. We are solid in doctrine but slow

in applying that doctrine in systematic formulations which will convincingly and unitedly speak to the ethical and social issues of our day. How does our theologizing address itself to a world living in the shadow of nuclear annihilation; to a world in which men play God via genetic engineering, abortion, and euthanasia; a world where millions live in poverty while the rest of us enjoy affluence and where millions suffer political, economic, and religious repression; a world where family norms and in many cases sexual norms are being blatantly disregarded?

We must do theology in context (without allowing the context to become our theology) and always be open to receive new insights into the Bible's meaning for today. J. Andrew Kirk writes that

. . . alongside our acceptance of the full authority of the Bible we also need a thoroughgoing and constant enquiry into the relationship between man's personal and social environment and his interpretation of the biblical text. I am increasingly convinced that the full authority of Scripture over the lives of Christian people can be effective only as and when we find a fresh approach to its interpretation which will provide an alternative both to orthodox critical scholarship and to the traditional evangelical, 'confessional' hermeneutic.<sup>23</sup>

In formulating Mennonite theology we need to be informed by the classical tradition but not bound by it. Furthermore, we must never ascribe to our efforts in theologizing the absolute authority which belongs only to Biblical doctrine. Although we are fully in touch with the political and social milieu and may even borrow its language, we must be careful not to let the form misrepresent and bend the essence of the Biblical content. For example, the "satisfaction view" of Christ's death utilized elaborate explanations from European systems of law which, as David Wells observes "have no more right to be accepted as divine truth than does the charter of the United Nations."<sup>24</sup> One of the greatest weaknesses in much of current liberation theology is that it leans so heavily upon action using the tools of the social and political sciences. The struggle to bring liberation in political and economic terms is not only seen as part of the Gospel but as the Gospel. The source of this theology then becomes the experience and need of an oppressed people and not the Scriptures. The shift in emphasis from doctrine to practice, from mere speculation to active involvement has great merit, yet it must be added that "social action is at most the corollary to, or the context for, the kerygmatic gospel, and is never its substitute."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Mennonites must guard against developing certain theological constructs (like premillennialism) in order to protect biblical doctrine. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, emerging Fundamentalism (as developed in the Bible



conference and prophecy movement) adopted premillennialism as an essential tenet in order to protect and buttress its doctrine of inspiration. Premillennialism appears as a cardinal point in significant late nineteenth century and early twentieth century doctrinal statements and the clear inference is that to disagree with this particular view of eschatology indicates a defective view of Scripture.<sup>26</sup> In his article on "Chiliasm" in The Mennonite Encyclopedia, H.H. Janzen maintains that dispensational premillennialism has been the teaching unofficially accepted in the course of the years by the entire Mennonite Brethren Church. He adds that in the upcoming revision of the M.B. Confession of Faith that it would be "most probable that certain paragraphs will be added giving the chiliastic conception as to the coming of the Lord, the rapture of the church, the time of tribulation, the millennium, and the final events connected with the coming of the Kingdom of God."<sup>27</sup> The 1975 revisors did not concur with making a theological construct synonymous with biblical doctrine and wisely left prophetic details out of the M.B. Confession of Faith. Our efforts at systematic theology must never be put on par with biblical doctrine but rather stand under its judgment.

In addressing the theological enterprise, one finds a greater latitude in General Conference circles than there is in Mennonite Brethren circles regarding how one interprets or reinterprets Christian doctrine. G.C. scholars have greater liberty to not only seriously question, but to outrightly deny some of the cardinal tenets of orthodoxy. The theological works of Gordon D. Kaufman, who is an ordained minister in the General Conference Mennonite Church and a Harvard professor, represents an extreme example of G.C. latitude. Kaufman denies the pre-existence of Christ, His virgin birth, and His literal, bodily resurrection. Halluncinations convinced the early believers that Jesus had been raised from the dead, states Kaufman.<sup>28</sup>

In his review of Kaufman's theology, A. James Reimer warns against creating a kind of Christianity which accommodates itself to our modern culture rather than "perceiving the revelatory content and expression of classical Christianity as standing in judgment of all human ideology throughout the ages."<sup>29</sup> How far Kaufman has moved in this accommodation process is revealed in his An Essay On Theological Method, where he states:

We no longer can settle theological issues by appeal to the authority of scripture or tradition. We must now undertake the much more difficult and hazardous task of deliberately and self-consciously constructing our concept of a God who is an adequate and meaningful object of devotion and center of the orientation of human life. In doing so we are free to

entertain on their own merits a variety of models for constructing the concept of God, and to accept or reject them without regard to their scriptural authorization.<sup>30</sup>

Kaufman states that his theology grows out of the liberal traditions rooted in the Enlightenment and modern experience.<sup>31</sup>

Some of Kaufman's books have been used as texts in Mennonite schools, along with other texts written with similar presuppositions. The prominence given in the curriculum of these schools to issues arising out of modern critical scholarship has been questioned by many within Mennonite Brethren, General Conference and (Old) Mennonite circles. George Brunk II reviews this situation in his booklet A Crisis Among Mennonites, suggesting therein that Kaufman is a "wolf wrapped in Anabaptist wool."<sup>32</sup>

The extent to which the theology taught in Canadian Mennonite colleges has been shaped by modern critical scholarship is not a part of this study. However, William Klassen's statement in the Journal of Mennonite Studies is intriguing and invites exploration. Klassen affirms, writing of Canadian Mennonite Colleges: "What is clear that Mennonite theology and certainly religious studies have definitely tackled the critical problems and lived with religious realities in a post-critical stage."<sup>33</sup>

M.B.'s do not generally share the same openness that G.C.'s do to what Pannebecker calls a wide range on the theological spectrum.<sup>34</sup> For example, it is doubtful that Canadian M.B.'s would have invited a Jürgen Moltmann to give a series of lectures on one of their campuses as did their General Conference brethren.<sup>35</sup>

Elmer Martens states that doctrinal purity is very important to the Mennonite Brethren and that "a strange fear grips the M.B.'s when the question of alignment with other Mennonites comes up. We seem to be afraid of being swallowed up or dominated by other Mennonite groups, thereby losing our doctrinal identity."<sup>36</sup>

J.B. Toews in his address at the 1982 Fresno Conference on Mennonite Pluralism stated that the Mennonite Brethren did not understand Anabaptist theology as leaving room for the wide range of theological thinking as do some Mennonite groups. Although Dr. Toews did not mention General Conference Mennonites as among these "other Mennonite groups," the documentation of this address in The Mennonite Quarterly Review clearly indicates he had the G.C.'s specifically in mind.<sup>37</sup> Toews made it clear that:

The theology of Menno, the major source for the Mennonite Brethren understanding of Anabaptism, has not provided for them a "wide latitude of theological

understanding." Theological considerations have made Mennonite Brethren selective in areas of inter-Mennonite cooperation. They have sometimes felt that some Mennonite groups have at times underemphasized essential aspects of New Testament truth as understood by the early Anabaptists.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. Common Distinctives

In their confessional statements and in actual practice, I believe, (the above observations notwithstanding) that in the mainstream M.B.'s and G.C.'s hold the cardinal tenets of the Christian faith in common.

#### a) The Authority of the Scriptures

The Souderton Statement affirms: "We believe in the inspiration and the infallibility of the Bible as the Word of God and the only trustworthy guide of faith and life."<sup>39</sup> The M.B. Confession of Faith<sup>40</sup> states the following:

We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God as men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit. We accept the Old and New Testaments as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative Guide for the faith and life of Christian discipleship. We believe that the Old Covenant was preparatory in nature, finding its fulfillment in the New Covenant. Christ is the key to understanding the Bible; the Old Testament bears witness to Him, and He is the One whom the New Testament proclaims.

Ps. 19; 119:105; Luke 24:27, 44; Rom. 1:18-23; II Tim. 3:15-17; II Peter 1:16-21; Heb. 1:1-2; 8:5-13.

#### b) The Necessity of Conversion

Souderton affirms that G.C.'s believe "a Christian is one saved by grace, whose life is transformed into the likeness of Christ by His atoning death and the power of His resurrection." The M.B. Confession of Faith states:

We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, convicts man of his sin and need for salvation. Those who repent of their sin and trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord receive forgiveness. By the power of the Holy Spirit they are born into the family of God and receive the assurance of salvation. Saving faith involves a surrender of the will to Christ, a complete trust in Him, and a joyful obedience to His Word as a faithful disciple.

Acts 2:42, 46; Eph. 1:13-14; 2:8-9; I Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 4:12; 9:15-28; I John 1:9.

#### c) Discipleship

The General Conference statement on this subject is the largest in the Confession:

We believe that Christ lived and taught the way of life as recorded in the Scriptures, which is God's plan for individuals and the race; and that it becomes disciples of Christ to live in this way, thus manifesting in their personal and social life and relationships the love and holiness of God. And we believe that his way of life also implies

nonresistance to evil by carnal means; the fullest exercise of love, and the resolute abandonment of the use of violence including warfare. We believe further that the Christian life will of necessity express itself in nonconformity to the world in life and conduct.

The M.B. statement affirms:

We believe that Christians should live by the law of love and practice the forgiveness of enemies as taught and exemplified by the Lord Jesus. The church, as the body of Christ, is a fellowship of redeemed, separated people, controlled by redemptive love. Its evangelistic responsibility is to present Christ, the Prince of Peace, as the answer to human need, enmity and violence. The evil, brutal and inhuman nature of war stands in contradiction to the new nature of the Christian. The Christian seeks to practice Christ's law of love in all relationships, and in all situations, including those involving personal injustice, social upheaval and international tensions. We believe that it is not God's will that Christians take up arms in military service but that, where possible they perform alternate service to reduce strife, alleviate suffering and bear witness to the love of Christ.

Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 5:17-28; 38-45; Rom. 12:19-21; 13:8-10; I Peter 2:19-23.

d) Believers' Church

Both Mennonite groups participated in the 1978 Study Conference on the Believers' Church in Canada and representatives from each body were heavily involved in the program.<sup>41</sup> General Conference leaders seem to have given more attention to this Anabaptist distinctive than have M.B.'s.<sup>42</sup>

Souderton states: "We believe that the Christian church consists of believers who have repented from their sins, have accepted Christ by faith and are born again, and sincerely endeavor by the grace of God to live the Christian life." Souderton was shaped by Fundamentalism and although this statement on the church contained key words in the orthodox vocabulary ("repented," "accepted Christ," "born again"), it strangely enough left out any mention of separation of church and state. Thus, by the mid-fifties, the G.C. brethren felt the need to elaborate and extend precisely this 1941 statement on the church. Among other points, the elaboration states:

- 1) We recognize that the Anabaptist vision of the church was to seek the restoration of the New Testament fellowship as a brotherhood of regenerated and disciplined believers whose faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2) We recognize this view of the church involves the practice of believers' baptism, scriptural church discipline, brotherly love and mutual aid, the separation of church and state, and the responsibility of giving individual and corporate witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.<sup>43</sup>

The M.B. Confession contains separate articles on the church (with sub-points on organization, nurture, and discipline), Christian baptism, and the Lord's Supper. The mission of the church and Christian ministries are also dealt with separately.

e) Mission

The next major study conference for the G.C.'s after the 1955 effort of defining the believers' church was the 1958 Study Conference on Evangelism dealing with the issue of how the believers' church extends itself.<sup>44</sup> Both M.B.'s and G.C.'s participated in Probe '72.

Both Souderton and the Cornelius Ris Mennonite Articles of Faith (the latter a document of 76 pages in length in the English translation) lack a statement on the mission of the church. However, the Constitution and Charter of the General Conference Mennonite Church states that the number one purpose of the G.C. Church is a fellowship of congregations committed to "proclaim Jesus Christ through appropriate ministries such as evangelism, missions, education, literature, service, relief, and community development to the end that persons may put their trust in God and receive Jesus Christ as Savior from the guilt and power of sin and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of the church."<sup>45</sup>

The M.B. Confession of Faith under the article "The Mission of the Church" states:

We believe that the command to make disciples of all nations is the primary task of the church. Every member has the responsibility to be a witness to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and to call men to be reconciled to God. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation and is able to meet the total needs of man.

Matt. 2:23; 11:5; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; II Cor. 5:18-20.

Both Mennonite groups have a broad understanding of mission which combines word and deed, proclamation and practical aid. M.B. and G.C. cooperation in the work of M.C.C., as well as in the Council of Mission Board secretaries are examples of a united witness in propagating a common faith. Bolder steps of cooperation in mission are being called for from a number of quarters.<sup>46</sup>

Of the aforementioned common distinctives, there has been, in the past, the opinion among many M.B.'s that their General Conference brethren were shaky in their theology of conversion (with the supposition being that M.B.'s have the correct understanding of this doctrine). I would affirm that M.B.'s and G.C.'s agree on the

need for and centrality of conversion in the Christian life. Where differences have arisen is in the Mennonite Brethren emphasis on a specific mode of conversion, i.e., the dated, crisis conversion.

G.C.'s also believe in crisis conversion but make greater allowance for coming to faith in a less dramatic way and over a period of time. A 1955 study of G.C.'s in North America concluded that the quiet, inner-decision experience was most common among their members.<sup>47</sup> The Kauffman-Harder measurement of initial conversion experiences revealed that conversion was a majority experience in all five groups surveyed. However, the group with the highest percentage of initial conversion experience was the M.B.'s (93%) and the group with the lowest was the General Conference (65%).<sup>48</sup>

G.C. historian Samuel Pannebecker affirms the fundamental place conversion and regeneration held in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology. "This single event," he writes, "whether viewed from the divine or the human side or from both together, was so important that it was basic to all else in the Christian life."<sup>49</sup> Whereas the reformers separated regeneration from moral change, "with infant baptism serving as the occasion for an inner spiritual regeneration which sometime later would produce the moral fruits of conversion,"<sup>50</sup> in Anabaptism the believer entered the new life via conversion and baptism was the external sign and seal. He entered the new life "with a sense of absolute responsibility to obey . . . (and) hence amendment of life and obedience to the word of Christ was a necessary concomitant of conversion."<sup>51</sup>

The 16th century ideals regarding conversion were not uniformly maintained by Mennonites in subsequent years. Although voluntary decision and adult baptism were retained, conversion became less vital. Pietism and revivalism brought a new emphasis on the necessity and spiritual significance of conversion and new Mennonite groups emerged in which not only conversion but "cataclysmic" conversion became the main distinctive. These new Mennonite movements "provided a needed corrective to formalism and secularism but often carried a subjective emphasis on conversion as an experience for its own sake, and by itself, disconnected from the life of suffering and obedience of the martyr days."<sup>52</sup>

It is true, as Pannebecker observes, that the Mennonite Brethren were among those groups which put considerable weight on confessing the precise date of one's conversion experience as a prerequisite for baptism and church membership.<sup>53</sup> However, it is noteworthy that the early fathers of the M.B. church had a very broad

view of man's salvation experience and as was the case with their 16th century forebears, were apparently more interested in observing a changed life than they were in the experience that had brought it about. Only one account of a conversion story of an early church leader has been preserved in the records. Due to subsequent influences, "dated" conversions took over as a prominent characteristic of M.B. theology.<sup>54</sup>

Mennonite Brethren have recognized the need to restudy their understanding of conversion, particularly since the experience of the fathers was duplicated at younger and younger ages among the children, but with a changed meaning. In his 1965 study of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Delbert Wiens suggested that M.B.'s were becoming more open to discuss how conversion comes about and more ready to recognize the validity of experiences other than "crisis" conversions.<sup>55</sup> Jake and Anne Loewen ploughed some new territory for M.B.'s in their 1969 study, "Can Child Conversions Last?", subtitled, "Socialization and Child Conversion: A Personal Record."<sup>56</sup> Particularly provocative in this study was the concept of the growth of the childhood conversion experience through gradual maturation, role rehearsal, self-discovery, and the progressive extension of the conversion commitment to new areas of life as they unfold.<sup>57</sup>

Recently, M.B.'s have produced some excellent studies on conversion. Conversion: Doorway to Discipleship, edited by Henry Schmidt, contains eight essays reflecting a broad understanding of this experience. Hans Kasdorf's Christian Conversion in Context projects the thesis that Christian conversion does not follow a stereotyped pattern but may take a variety of forms, both personal and multi-personal.<sup>58</sup> The October, 1980 issue of Direction is devoted entirely to the theme of conversion.<sup>59</sup>

General Conference leaders have also endeavored to articulate a clear theology of conversion. C.M.B.C. president-elect John H. Neufeld's, A Study Paper on the Meaning of Conversion, deals very lucidly with a number of concepts related to conversion, such as, depravity, original sin, accountability and the religion of childhood, as well as the religion of adolescence.<sup>60</sup> Cornelia Lehn's study entitled, The Education and Conversion of Children, projects a theology of conversion not unlike that reflected in recent M.B. studies.<sup>61</sup> C.J. Dyck's "New Life in Christ - in Anabaptist Perspective" appeared in a recent issue of The Mennonite.<sup>62</sup> The most in-depth study of those mentioned is Marlin Jeschke's book, Believers Baptism for Children of the Church.<sup>63</sup> Jeschke does a comprehensive study of the

historical and Biblical materials on such issues as original sin and election, innocence and accountability, the conversion of children, and baptism for believing children. This book needs to be read by all Mennonites, of whatever stripe, and especially parents.

It is my opinion that M.B.'s and G.C.'s are much closer in their basic theology of conversion than has often been thought. Probe '72, the first all-Mennonite consultation on evangelism demonstrated that M.B.'s and G.C.'s were united regarding the necessity of personal conversion and committed to the proclamation of that message. There is great truth in what one delegate at those sessions observed: "It is of real significance that the sons of Menno could sit for four days to talk about evangelism and find that they talk the same language."<sup>64</sup>

#### 4. Differences: Imagined and Real

Perhaps in the past, church discipline has been more lax in G.C. churches than among M.B.'s.<sup>65</sup> However, General Conference leaders have addressed this problem. A Study Commission on Church Discipline worked on this issue from 1956 to 1959 and reported to the 1959 session of the General Conference. The first part of their report affirmed Biblical discipline as essential to the church's life and urged "a whole church renewal, general repentance and reconciliation among the faithful members of the congregation, and early teaching on questionable matters."<sup>66</sup>

The second part of the Study Commission report was a source book for congregational use entitled Studies in Church Discipline.<sup>67</sup> This is an excellent study guide, used even outside G.C. circles. It sets a Biblical and historical framework for church discipline and deals with current issues, such as marriage and divorce, racial prejudice, business ethics, lodges, alcohol and a Biblical understanding of leisure. Marlin Jeschke's Discipling the Brother is a more recent work on church discipline, which together with the Leader's Guide provides positive study material for congregations on this important topic.<sup>68</sup>

In 1974 the Mennonite Brethren Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns (Canadian Conference) presented an update of the Conference Biblical understanding of dealing in "loving discipline" as to be practiced in M.B. churches in a paper written by Frank C. Peters.<sup>69</sup> An excellent overview of Mennonite Brethren church discipline practices has been provided by Marvin Warkentin in a recent issue of



Direction.<sup>70</sup> My impression is that M.B.'s and G.C.'s hold to a common view on Biblical church discipline, although in actual practice there is probably as much variation between congregations within each denomination as there is between the two conferences.

Another frequently mentioned difference between M.B.'s and G.C.'s (which is likely more imagined than real) is that in church polity G.C.'s allow for greater congregational autonomy, whereas M.B.'s are more responsive to the directives and concerns as they relate to the larger brotherhood. At the July, 1983 annual sessions of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada held in Winnipeg, a major study probed "excessive congregationalism" among G.C.'s. Rod Sawatsky's "Autonomy and Accountability: Church Polity Within the Conference of Mennonites in Canada," published in its entirety in the September 19, 1983 issue of the Mennonite Reporter is described as an "in house" document brought into the open to a broader inter-Mennonite forum for wider discernment and evaluation.<sup>71</sup>

A careful analysis of Sawatsky's paper reveals the following current concerns among G.C.'s in Canada:

1. The need for the General Conference Church to delineate its understanding of leadership and authority for the well-being of its faith and order. In the traditional era this task was performed primarily by the bishops, ministers, and deacons, while matters pertaining to education, mission, and service were often not given proper attention. Now the order is reversed: life and work is strong but faith and order is weak. Sawatsky writes that

. . . we need to reaffirm the importance of a good and right theology as well as a good and right polity. We expect our schools, colleges and seminaries to teach right theology but we don't have any structures in our churches and conferences to work at our common theologizing. No wonder our young people and older people alike are so naive theologically, and too often don't think it is important what they believe.<sup>72</sup>

2. Since individual congregations have such great authority and the conference little, who establishes the standards for ordination? Is the examination and affirmation of the ministerial candidate by the individual congregation sufficient or should the larger brotherhood be involved? Sawatsky asks:

What standards does the conference use to deal with doctrinal or ethical heresy? Are we not mutually accountable for the faith and order of the churches who become part of this conference, even as we are mutually accountable for the faith and order of all the members in our local congregations?<sup>73</sup>

3. In current G.C. church polity each pastor operates alone in an autonomous congregation. When problems arise, no one has any authority to intercede in a congregation unless invited by that congregation.

The dangers of individualism are now structurally confirmed by individualistic congregationalism. For even as individualism says what I do is none of your business, so too congregational individualism says what we do in our congregation is none of your business.<sup>74</sup>

Sawatsky suggests a redefining of conference polity whereby in matters of leadership and authority the Canadian Conference of Mennonites becomes the most inclusive covenantal body. A restructuring of the Canadian Conference, he states, should establish a major board on faith and order (I take it not unlike the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns in the M.B. Canadian Conference structure).

The Mennonite Brethren are grappling with similar issues in the area of leadership and authority. A 1980 Clearbrook study conference sponsored by the Board of Reference and Counsel of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren heard papers on the call and ordination to the ministry (Victor Adrian), leadership styles (John E. Toews), church-pastor relations (Herb Brandt), the ministry of the divorced and remarried (Marvin Hein), and the place of the woman in the church (David Ewert).<sup>75</sup> Except for the last topic on the ministry of women in the church, M.B.'s come to identical or very similar positions to those held by their brothers and sisters in the General Conference Church.

J.B. Toews, who has 50 years of public ministry to reflect upon in evaluating the M.B. church, sees a loss of Spirit-led consensus in the brotherhood. Democracy, i.e., simple majority rule, often prevails in the church. Along with this, Toews notes the same kind of spirit of individualism that Rod Sawatsky refers to in his analysis of the G.C.'s.

The spirit of individualism has crept into the church and found ready acceptance. Church decisions and conference mandates are no longer seen as binding; accountability to the larger conference body is seen as a thing of the past.<sup>76</sup>

Toews echoes the sentiments of Marvin Hein, who recently said of his fellow M.B.'s:

Our churches are becoming more and more groups of individuals who are persuaded no one can tell them anything. Having once covenanted to admonish and be admonished, if and when unchristian behavior is known among us, we now bluntly maintain that our life is our business.<sup>77</sup>

It seems to me that both M.B.'s and G.C.'s need a renewal of the Biblical understanding of what it means to be a brotherhood in the larger sense of that word.

That larger sense of brotherhood would free our churches from the current excessive congregational individualism and lead to a much greater cooperation with and support for the larger covenantal body in its decisions regarding faith and order, as well as ministry and service.

One of the major differences between M.B.'s and G.C.'s pertains to the question of the mode of believers' baptism. Although there has been some change of attitude, particularly among the Mennonite Brethren in that they now recognize baptism by affusion as at least sufficient for transfer into membership in the M.B. Church, the water of baptism still remains in the title of a recent book on the subject, The Water That Divides.<sup>78</sup>

A careful analysis of M.B. baptismal practice and theology reveals the following:

a) The question of the mode of baptism was not an issue for the founding fathers of the M.B. Church. Believers' baptism was emphasized--not a "memorized faith," but "a genuine, living faith effected by the Spirit of God."<sup>79</sup>

The first baptism by immersion in the fledgling M.B. Church did not occur until more than eight months after the January 6, 1860 Document of Secession had been signed.<sup>80</sup> The first minister and elder of the M.B. Church, Heinrich Huebert, was not rebaptized until a year after his election as minister, while the highly respected Johann Claassen was not rebaptized until after June 30, 1862.<sup>81</sup>

b) It was not until 1862 that immersion was established as the required mode of baptism in the M.B. Church, and this largely because the Chortitza Brethren (influenced by the German Baptists) considered baptism by immersion a prerequisite for church membership. When this latter view prevailed, a number of members in the Molotschna withdrew from the church. Four had been signers of the Document of Secession.<sup>82</sup>

c) As J.A. Toews notes: "Baptist influence on the mode of baptism in the M.B. Church cannot be denied."<sup>83</sup> That influence came not only through those in the Chortitza, who like Abraham Unger carried on an active correspondence with J.G. Oncken, the father of the German Baptist movement, but Baptist influence also impacted some of the key leaders of the new movement in the Molotschna. In 1837 Jacob Reimer had already begun to question whether sprinkling or pouring were Biblical modes of baptism. As an 18 year old, he had read the biography of Anne Judson and expressed the desire to be baptized by

immersion. Reimer's father had also made him aware of the German Baptists of Prussia who baptized by immersion.<sup>84</sup>

Recent research has shown that Jacob Becker, who precipitated baptism by immersion among the M.B.'s in the Molotschna, had also been influenced by Baptist literature to accept that mode and only then found confirmation for immersion in the writings of Menno Simons.<sup>85</sup> Johann Claassen had studied a Baptist pamphlet on immersion which he likely received from a St. Petersburg Baptist layman, C. Plonus, with whom Claassen lived for a short time in 1860.<sup>86</sup> Claassen gave Becker this pamphlet. Becker and Heinrich Bartel studied it carefully and then searched the writings of Menno, finally coming to the conclusion that they both needed to be rebaptized by immersion.

d) The first M.B. statement on baptism made in North America reaffirmed baptism by immersion backward, but also recognized baptism by immersion while kneeling or the forward immersion form, providing it was performed upon confession of faith.<sup>87</sup> In 1957, the M.B.'s again stressed the great significance of the immersion mode of baptism. A resolution was passed that

. . . we do hold and teach that the act of baptism, as well as the mode of baptism, is of fundamental importance. The act is important because it is enjoined by Christ upon every believer. The mode of baptism (immersion) is important because it is the only mode which adequately sets forth in symbol the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Any other mode of baptism invalidates the real, symbolical meaning of baptism.<sup>88</sup>

A closed case for immersion is presented in the 1957 M.B. General Conference resolution. "Baptizo" requires the meaning "immerse" and the believer is never said to be baptized with water, as would be required by sprinkling or pouring, but always in water. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan; John baptized where there was much water; the eunuch and Philip "went down into the water." The resolution ends with the statement: "Any substitution of the mode of baptism abrogates its symbolical meaning."<sup>89</sup>

e) The next series of statements on baptism reveal a shift in thinking. A 1963 resolution permits local churches to accept into fellowship believers who "have been baptized upon an experiential and confessed faith with a mode of baptism other than immersion." These newly accepted members "will not function or be candidates in any office requiring ordination in the Mennonite Brethren Church" and "such privileges relate to fellowship in the local church and therefore churches will not transfer by letter any members received into fellowship without immersion."<sup>90</sup>

After the 1963 decision, the Board of Reference and Counsel was encouraged by regional conferences, churches, and concerned individuals to study once again the question of acceptance into membership of non-immersed believers and their transfer to churches within the brotherhood. The Board's response to the 1972 convention was a reaffirmation of immersion as the only form of baptism and an encouragement to the non-immersed who applied for membership to consider baptism by immersion. However, the following significant recommendation was presented and passed by the convention:

. . . in view of the generally favorable acceptance of the practice initiated at the 1963 convention, we as a Board recommend to our brotherhood, that non-immersed members who have been accepted into the fellowship of local churches be allowed to transfer to other M.B. churches by letter.<sup>91</sup>

By the late 1970's, a number of Canadian churches had staff members who had come from a General Conference background and were ministering in M.B. churches without the benefit of immersion. This violated the spirit and in some cases the letter of the 1963 General Conference resolution. Thus, the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns presented the following to the delegates gathered at the 1979 Canadian Conference meeting in Richmond, B.C.:

Recommendation: (Regarding pastors and assistant pastors who have not been baptized by immersion) We recommend, "That as a Conference we reaffirm the principle that we require all persons who hold positions in churches which normally call for ordination, or that are considered eligible for ordination, that they be baptized by immersion. In addition to pastors, this requirement would concern associate or assistant pastors, although these may not be serving in a pulpit ministry."<sup>92</sup>

This recommendation generated a great deal of discussion from the floor, particularly since British Columbia had a number of M.B. churches in which non-immersed ministers served. Debate was finally cut off and the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns directed to refer the issue to the General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel.

At the 1981 sessions of the M.B. General Conference, it was evident that there was growing sentiment in favor of broadening M.B. polity in order to allow non-immersed brethren to minister in the M.B. Church. There were also still strong feelings of support for the Board's recommendation to hold the line in this matter. "You can't teach immersion freely if you haven't been immersed yourself," noted a veteran M.B. pastor.<sup>93</sup> David Ewert, member of the Board, stated that a good doctrinal case might be given for other forms of baptism but "it is unity of practice that we want."<sup>94</sup>

The amended motion before the delegates read: "In order that the M.B. Conference remain unified: 1. Those seeking ordination, or recognition of ordination by another denomination, shall be baptized by immersion, since that is the form of baptism practiced by the M.B. Church."<sup>95</sup> The motion passed by a very slight majority but the convention was so divided on the issue that a motion to refer the whole matter back to the Board of Reference and Counsel and the churches was easily passed.

A recent letter in The Christian Leader is typical of at least one large segment of opinion among M.B.'s on the baptism question. The writer quotes from a January, 1983 Board of Reference and Counsel letter of clarification circulated among the churches which says, in part:

On the theological side of the question, our Confession of Faith does affirm immersion as the mode of baptism to be practiced in the M.B. Church. We do require our ministers to subscribe to the M.B. Confession of Faith. Thus, unless the brotherhood chooses to change the Confession of Faith to affirm other forms of baptism as well as immersion, we feel consistency demands that we accept the BORAC resolution as presented to the conference.<sup>96</sup>

To the above statement, the writer responds that although he has no particular problem with the Board's resolution, he looks at Article 15 in the M.B. Confession of Faith on love and nonresistance where he senses a lack of uniformity among M.B. ministers. He concludes, "If we feel uniformity on Article 9 (Baptism) is so important, then let's make uniformity an important issue on all articles in our Confession of Faith including Article 15 (Love and Nonresistance)."<sup>97</sup> A G.C. brother recently queried me as to how it was that M.B.'s found it much easier to accept as pastors for their churches those who did not subscribe to the M.B. doctrinal statement regarding love and nonresistance than they did to accept those who affirmed believers baptism but were themselves baptized by a mode other than immersion.

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada, along with the majority of Mennonites in the past, holds to affusion (pouring or sprinkling) as the mode of believers' baptism. However, immersion is also seen as a valid form of baptism and there are congregations in the Conference which practice both affusion and immersion.<sup>98</sup>

The G.C. rationale for affusion (pouring or sprinkling) is (in very condensed form) as follows:

- a) The Greek term "baptizo" has various meanings. Certainly immersion is one of those meanings, but the word is also used with reference to washings

or rites of cleansing, where immersion could hardly be understood. The Hebrew word "tabal" is used in the sense of ritual cleansing. Both pouring and sprinkling were prescribed forms by which the spiritual transactions of cleansing and spiritual endowment were symbolized in the Old Testament (Lev. 8:12; 14:18; Num. 19:20). These terms also appear in prophetic utterances (Isa. 44:3; Ez. 36:25; Joel 2:28-29).

The question arises: is there any adequate reason to believe that the early New Testament leaders with their Jewish background would make a radical departure from the forms and practices of their past history? Many prophecies said the Messiah would come and pour; sprinkle, purify His people, and "the Jews who for over a thousand years had known this way of purification--to pour or sprinkle some liquid on the person or object to be purified -- could readily see (and understand) the symbol of water baptism (administered in the same way)."<sup>99</sup>

b) The Greek preposition "en" may be translated "in" or "with" according to the context. John's baptizing activity in the Jordan River need not imply immersion. The same preposition "en" is used to speak of John baptizing in the wilderness. It may merely denote geographical location.

Two reasons lead G.C.'s to use the English preposition "with" rather than "in" in connection with water baptism. For one, various examples of anointing with oil use the expression in the Greek "in oil" (Ps. 23:5; Ez. 16:9). Secondly, there is the comparison made by John in Matthew 3:11, "I baptize you en water for repentance, but he . . . will baptize you en the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Consistency would lead one to translate the preposition in both places the same way. It is difficult to understand how one could be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The picture of Pentecost would point more to the idea of the Spirit coming upon one. In fact, Peter sees this as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy: 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . . ' (Acts 2:17). There are three other references where the Spirit is said to be 'poured out' (Acts 2:18, 33; Titus 3:5-7).<sup>100</sup>

c) Although there are references in early patristic writings which speak of immersion (Didache), other patristic passages speak of sprinkling or pouring. Various pictorial representations of baptism in the early centuries almost invariably show the candidate having water poured on him.<sup>101</sup>

d) Remembering that baptism is a symbol of what Christ has done for us when we came to faith, received the Holy Spirit and were cleansed from sin,

affusion as well as immersion are appropriate acts symbolizing the reality of that inner, spiritual experience of our Lord's saving grace. "It is the proclamation of Christ, not baptism, which is central."<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, since on linguistic, historical, and exegetical grounds a case can be made for both affusion and immersion, it is "difficult to argue for the validity of one at the expense of the other."<sup>103</sup>

My conviction is that both Mennonite groups need to recognize that although the New Testament is very clear regarding the act of baptism and its necessity for a true disciple of Jesus Christ, it nowhere prescribes the mode.<sup>104</sup> Coming to this understanding would produce greater charity toward and acceptance of the group which practices a mode of believers' baptism other than our own. It would also lead to the recognition that to insist on rebaptism forces the recipient to deny the integrity and validity of his or her first baptism as a genuine sign of Christian faith and commitment.

Marlin Jeschke urges Mennonite churches to emphasize in their teaching and preaching the meaning of baptism as a sign of one's coming to faith and then let that form be used which best reflects that meaning. He suggests affusion as more fitting for someone who is born and reared within the community of faith and immersion as appropriate for the adult convert coming from the non-Christian world as did converts in the New Testament.<sup>105</sup>

##### 5. A Common Center, A Single Foundation

A number of factors have caused M.B.'s and G.C.'s in Canada to move off center from their common Anabaptist theological base. Perhaps the chief factor is a characteristic both groups share--they rather freely and often indiscriminately borrow from outside sources.

Leaders in both groups have expressed concern over this assimilation process. Already in the 1950's, G.C. leaders like Cornelius Krahn and Ed G. Kaufman were lamenting the negative effects of borrowing so many doctrines and practices foreign to G.C. doctrine and practice. For example, Krahn observed:

We have undergone so many and varied influences from different schools of thought, colleges, seminaries, Bible schools, publications, radios, etc., that it is extremely urgent for us to study the biblical, theological, and ethical cornerstones of our own thinking and beliefs in the light of the mission and heritage of our forefathers.<sup>106</sup>



In 1975 J.A. Toews wrote:

Possibly no other theological system has influenced Mennonite Brethren theology during the past fifty years as much as dispensationalism. In the thinking of many Bible students this form of Scripture interpretation is identified with premillennialism, and even with true biblicism.<sup>107</sup>

Fundamentalism has influenced both Mennonite groups, M.B.'s more so than G.C.'s, as noted earlier. Most M.B.'s and G.C.'s took the side of the theological conservatives in the battle against modernism, yet did not formally join the Fundamentalist ranks. Paul Toews observes:

Fundamentalism among Mennonites was as much an effort to redefine the relationship between culture and Christianity as a crusade to root out theological modernism--and perhaps it was even more the former than the latter. It was that kind of movement because the theological modernism in the Mennonite world was only incipient and marginal.<sup>108</sup>

Fundamentalist theology continues to influence M.B. and G.C. thought and practice. The excessive congregational individualism described earlier is undoubtedly a reflection of the "Lone Ranger" type of ecclesiology espoused in some North American evangelical circles. The privatization of religion--the "sweet Jesus and me" syndrome, so foreign to the New Testament and Anabaptist emphasis on accountability to the brotherhood and corporate witness to the world, also stems from certain sectors of popular evangelicalism. J.B. Toews notes:

There exists a trend toward accommodation to Canadian and U.S. culture in the frame of U.S. fundamentalism. . . The utilitarian ethos of U.S. evangelicalism with its emphasis on personal benefits and profit in the context of a creedal faith has for many influenced the basic understanding of redemption and Christian life.<sup>109</sup>

An eschatological pessimism which fosters a life-boat ethic (i.e., the rescue operation of saving souls is all that matters) and a tendency to give up on the future since the Lord's return is imminent, is also rooted in influences received from Dispensational Fundamentalism.<sup>110</sup> The recent push to redefine our view of Scripture in terms of inerrancy (more pronounced among M.B.'s than among G.C.'s) is also fed by Fundamentalist sources. M.B.'s and G.C.'s in Canada have always accepted the Bible as the Word of God. However, that conviction has not been formed so much as the end result of logical proofs and arguments as it has through the witness of the Spirit, simple faith, and obedience. Perhaps with the decline of practical obedience and an experiential relationship with God's truth we have been more open to move toward precise verbal declarations of the Bible's infallibility as an unconscious effort to convince ourselves that even though we may not

obey it or experience its power, yes, the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Perhaps a decline in our life of discipleship and being doers of the Word is being camouflaged by being caught up with being describers of the Word.

The aforementioned influences have pushed both M.B.'s and G.C.'s toward bounded set thinking and this, in turn, has tended to make them suspicious rather than trusting, not only of the other Mennonite group, but of brothers and sisters within their own group. Centered set thinking could obviate this tendency.

Approaching the doctrine of conversion from within a centered set conceptual framework would see it as a crisis experience or a quiet coming to faith--the emphasis being on the living relationship with Christ and growing toward His likeness, not the mode of conversion. When a great deal of emphasis is placed on a "once for all conversion," ideally experienced in one's younger years, the growing young person might feel this is all there is for him in his Christian experience. He may then discover that the decision made early in life is no longer capable of meeting his needs at the new level of maturity and questioning reached in his late adolescent or early adulthood years. Then there is the danger of denying his childhood experience (which was valid as a childhood experience) and throwing over his Christian faith as being irrelevant to adult life. Teaching the necessity of continually making new commitments commensurate with new levels of understanding of what God requires of a growing disciple of Christ is a much more wholesome and Biblical approach. This is a centered set way of thinking about the Christian life--it is "a dynamic relationship rather than a static state," a process of moving ever closer to the center (Jesus Christ), and viewing each Christian (including ourselves) "as being underway but in no sense at the destination."<sup>111</sup>

A centered set way of thinking about baptism would once again focus on the center and essence of the baptismal act, i.e., the believer's proclamation of Jesus Christ and His saving work. Keeping this meaning central, the form becomes secondary and the only concern is that whether the believer be immersed, sprinkled or poured, the mode as clearly as possible serves as a sign of the deep, spiritual reality which is central to our Christian faith.

On a broader scope, the formation of Columbia Bible Institute in Clearbrook, B.C. is one example of what can happen when two Mennonite groups take seriously the implications of "a common center, single foundation" motif.

In 1970 the Conference of Mennonites in B.C. closed the doors of their Bethel Bible Institute in Abbotsford and by a working agreement entered into with the B.C.

Conference of Mennonite Brethren invited its students to the larger M.B. Clearbrook campus. In 1982 this cooperative effort was expanded into a covenant whereby M.B.'s invited G.C.'s to unite in "the ownership, governance, operation, and development of the Columbia Bible Institute."<sup>112</sup> At the historic June 11, 1982 joint convention, Dick Rempel, B.C. Conference Minister for the Conference of Mennonites responded to the M.B. welcome by affirming this was a continuing covenant of togetherness in working in God's kingdom. "We are all in the same boat and owe each other terrible loyalty," said Rempel.<sup>113</sup> Thus, the first inter-Mennonite Bible Institute in North America was established to actively "promote and teach a strong evangelical, Anabaptist (Mennonite) theology as reflected in the Confession of Faith of C.B.I. and of the supporting conferences."<sup>114</sup>

Many developments paved the way for this historic cooperative venture between M.B.'s and G.C.'s.<sup>115</sup> Trust between the two conferences had to be built up over the years. Above all, a common focus and mutual commitment to Anabaptist distinctives formed the bedrock of this union. The president of C.B.I. affirmed in an article in the Mennonite Reporter that a common theological base makes cooperation at C.B.I. possible.<sup>116</sup>

C.B.I. is undoubtedly the most significant example of cooperation between G.C.'s and M.B.'s in Canada where theological issues are dominant. C.B.I. is not the result of watering down of these issues. The school's Confession of Faith clearly corroborates this (see Appendix A). Furthermore, as president Roy Just writes:

Both conferences strongly support evangelism and mission. Both are dedicated to social concern and peace. Both stress discipleship and support a strong theology of the church. Both believe in sound biblical training for their youth. There is common agreement that the Christian life begins with conversion, being born again, and that its fruit is manifested in a life of obedience to the teaching of the Scripture. Both have a high view of Christ and the Word of God. Believer's baptism, the covenanting community of God's people and the discerning of gifts are strongly affirmed.<sup>117</sup>

Hopefully the C.B.I. experience can provide a model to inspire further cooperative ventures between M.B.'s and G.C.'s in Canada.

One of the greatest benefits of this symposium on M.B./G.C. relations in Canada is that commonalities between the two groups can be affirmed and differences openly discussed. New understandings can be gained regarding not only the theology, but also the heartbeat of each group. Prejudice, bred by ignorance, can be dissipated.

A greater sense of trust of one another (not suspicion) can be generated. A new commitment by both groups to focus on the essence and center of a common faith can be made. Such an approach of understanding, affirming and loving one another can form the basis for future joint M.B./G.C. ventures far beyond what is already being done in M.C.C. work or the occasional inter-Mennonite conference. May this be accomplished in God's good time and in harmony with His good and perfect will!

## ENDNOTES

1 J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, Anabaptists Four Centuries Later (Scottdale and Kitchener: Herald Press, 1975), p. 106.

2 See Paul G. Hiebert, "Sets and Structures: A Study of Church Patterns" in David J. Hesselgrave, ed., New Horizons in World Mission (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 217-27. Frances F. Hiebert has developed and applied the bounded set/centered set paradigm in "Apples, Oranges, Anabaptists, and Mennonite Brethren," Direction XI (July 1982): 3 - 11. Paul Hiebert recasts this paradigm in his "Conversion in cross-cultural perspective" in Henry J. Schmidt, ed., Conversion: Doorway to Discipleship (Hillsboro: Board of Christian Literature, 1980), pp. 88-98. I am indebted to the Hieberts in my discussion of "sets".

3 "Apples, Oranges...", 7 - 8.

4 Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920 - 1940 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), pp. 467 - 69.

5 Samuel Floyd Pannabecker, Open Doors (Newton: Faith & Life Press, 1975), p. 381.

6 John H. Redekop, "The Mennonite Brethren Church Today", paper presented at the 1976 Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, p. 14.

7 Ibid.

8 J.A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, 1975), p. 361.

9 Pannabecker, p. 387.

10 M.E., I, 685.

11 Pannabecker, p. 387.

12 Howard John Loewen, One Lord, One Church, One Hope, a paper presented at the Mennonite Experience in America Conference IV: Mennonite Pluralism, October 21 - 23, 1982, M.B. Biblical Seminary, Fresno, Cal., pp. 47-48. Cf. MQR LVII (July 1983): 281.

13 Ibid.

14 M.E., I, 679.

15 Ibid., 680.

16 Ibid., 682.

17 Loewen, p. 47.

18 Robert Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism (Scottdale and Kitchener: Herald Press, 1973), p. 25.

19 Ibid., p. 31.

20 Ibid., p. 27.

21 A. James Reimer, "The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology", Conrad Grebel Review, I (Winter 1983): 53.

22 David F. Wells, The Search for Salvation (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 40. In the new Journal of Mennonite Studies I (1983): 179-90 Paul Erb makes some excellent observations in his "A Reflection on Mennonite Theology in Canada." He urges a Mennonite theologizing which is cognizant of the peculiar Canadian situation. Erb states, "Mennonite Canadians desperately need a theology of political life". He also calls for articulating a theology of the family and of sexuality, as well as a renewed theology of conversion, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, the latter to be developed within a new theology of worship.

23 J. Andrew Kirk, Theology Encounters Revolution (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 10.

24 Wells, p. 43.

25 Ibid., p. 136. Anabaptist and evangelical scholars are taking a second, more appreciative look at liberation theology, noting some striking similarities between Latin America's "churches of the poor" and the believer's church of the Anabaptist tradition (see Missiology, January, 1983; Mission Focus, June, 1981; and especially La Verne Rutschman's "Anabaptism and Liberation Theology", The Mennonite Quarterly Review LV (July 1981): 255 - 70 .

26 See Walter Unger, "Earnestly Contending For the Faith": The Role of the Niagara Bible Conference in the Emergence of American Fundamentalism, 1875 - 1900 (Ph.D. dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1982), Ch. 3 "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth".

27 M.E., I, 559 - 60.

28 Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 203-205 and pp. 425-26. Kaufman is a member of the Boston Mennonite Church.

29 Reimer, p. 49.

30 Ibid, p. 50.

31 Ibid. Whereas Kaufman still stressed the "revelational foundations" of theology in his 1968 work, 1975 marked an important turning point with the publication of his An Essay on Theological Method. In the preface to his latest book, The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), he states that he has come to a new, definite way of doing theology. Imagination has become the alternative to revelation. Right at the outset of this work, Kaufman distinguishes the word 'God' from "the reality of God." As one reviewer describes Kaufman's view: "Since God is not a datum available for our inspection, we are dependent on 'the image of God'---that is, on 'God'---something which 'is put together by the mind'." See Religious Studies Review, July, 1983 for two lengthy reviews of Kaufman's theology under the caption, "Reconstruction Christian Theology," pp. 219-27. In his Conrad Grebel Review analysis of Kaufman's Theology, A. James Reimer states that he is aware of the problems inherent in the classical view of God and of theology, but is not convinced that the modern-historicist model has fewer problems and frees us from heteronomy. He calls for a new hearing of the traditional view and formulation of God, man, and history, adding: "Not that it can be transplanted into the modern world in its pristine purity--it necessarily must be taken through the prism of the Enlightenment which has profoundly shaped us all--but at least its fundamental affirmations should be openly reconsidered." p. 51.

32 George R. Brunk II, A Crisis Among Mennonites (Harrisonburg: The Sword and Trumpet, 1983), p. 3.

33 William Klassen, "Mennonite Studies as a Part of Religious Studies," Journal of Mennonite Studies I (1983): p. 162-63.

34 Pannebecker, p. 383.

35 Allan J. Siebert, "Moltmann Lectures an Important Ecumenical Event," Mennonite Reporter, November 1, 1982, p. 1. The Moltmann lectures have been published co-jointly by the Institute of Mennonite Studies in Elkhart and C.M.B.C. Publications, Winnipeg, under the title Following Jesus Christ in the World Today: Responsibility for the World and Christian Discipleship. George Brunk roundly condemns Moltmann's visit to Mennonite campuses in his A Crisis Among Mennonites, p. 3.

36 As cited in Anabaptists Four Centuries Later, p. 247.

37 See M.Q.R. LVII (July 1983): p. 262, footnote 19.

38 Ibid.

39 All references to and quotations from the Souderton Statement are taken from the 1977 Constitution and Bylaws of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, pp. 8-10. An excellent supplement to the rather brief Souderton Statement re the Scriptures is the 23 page pamphlet printed after the 1962 G.C. statement on the authority of the Scriptures made at the 1962 triennial conference of G.C.'s. The pamphlet is entitled A Christian Declaration on the Authority of the Scriptures and is available from the General Conference Mennonite Church, 722 Main St., Newton, Kansas.

40 All references to and quotations from the M.B. Confession of Faith are taken from Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1976). The statement on Scripture is on pp. 11 and 12.

41 See The Believers' Church in Canada: Addresses and Papers from the Study Conference in Winnipeg, May 15-18, 1978, edited by Jarold K. Zeman and Walter Klaassen, published by The Baptist Federation of Canada and Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), 1979.

42 See Proceedings of the Study Conference on the Believers' Church held at Mennonite Biblical Seminary, August 23-25, 1955, as well as the fine seven-page pamphlet based on that conference, A Statement on the Believers' Church.

43 A Statement on the Believers' Church, p. 4.

44 See the report of this Study Conference in Evangelism in The Mennonite, November 2, 1958, pp. 542-44.

45 Constitution and Charter of the General Conference Mennonite Church, revised 1975, p. 7.

46 See J.A. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren in Inter-Mennonite Endeavors," Direction VII (July 1978): pp.3-10. Toews lauds Myron Augsburg's dream shared at the 1977

Canadian Conference of M.B.'s--a dream of abolishing all mission headquarters in North America and establishing a center for world missions in a city like Nairobi, in which all Mennonite conferences would participate.

47 Proceedings of the Study Conference on the Believers' Church, p. 33.

48 Anabaptists Four Centuries Later, p. 87. The Mennonite Brethren have subsequently produced their own Church Member Profile Questionnaire (1982) which asks almost identical questions as did the Kauffmann-Harder survey. Some changes, however, were made, one of which was in the area of conversion. Whereas the Kauffman-Harder survey had a broader definition of initial conversion without limiting either the content or the timing of that experience too narrowly, the M.B. questionnaire affirms, "The Mennonite Brethren believe that all its members must experience a conversion as a distinct occasion in life," and then asks if such a conversion "as a distinct occasion in life" was experienced by the respondent.

49 M.E., I, p. 704.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., p. 705

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Toews, History of the M.B. Church, p. 369.

55 Delbert Wiens, New Wineskins for Old Wine (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1965), pp. 4-5.

56 Jacob and Anne Loewen, "Can Child Conversions Last?" Mennonite Brethren Herald, October 17, 1969, pp. 2-6.

57 Ibid., p. 5.

58 Hans Kasdorf, Christian Conversion in Context (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980).

59 Essays are by Harold Dyck, "The Conversion of Paul: A Model?" Al Dueck, "Contexts of Conversion," Gerry Ediger, "Conversion in Anabaptist and Mennonite History," and George Konrad, "The Conversion of Children."

60 John H. Neufeld, A Study Paper on the Meaning of Conversion, October, 1970.

61 Cornelia Lehn, The Education and Conversion of Children (Newton: Faith and Life Press, n.d.)

62 The Mennonite, July 5, 1983, pp. 314-15.

63 Marlin Jeschke, Believers Baptism For Children of the Church (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1983).

64 "Probe '72 - Historic Evangelism Gathering," The Christian Leader, May 2, 1972, p. 19.



65 Pannebecker, p.385. A 1955 study showed that 25 per cent of G.C. congregations in North America had no written or constitutional code for discipline and that 10 per cent of those who did, never followed it. Half of the congregations had not had a case of discipline for the preceding few years. Ibid.; see full report, Maynard Shelly, "Practices and Trends in Mennonite Congregations," in The Believers' Church, pp. 23-39. See also C.J. Dyck's incisive paper, "Discipline in the General Conference," pp. 125-134 in The Believers' Church.

66 Pannebecker, p. 406.

67 Studies in Church Discipline (Newton: Mennonite Publication Office, 1958).

68 Marlin Jeschke, Discipling the Brother Leader's Guide from same source. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1972).

69 Frank C. Peters, "Three Alternatives to Excommunication," Mennonite Brethren Herald, September 6, 1974, pp. 6-8.

70 Marvin Warkentin, "Church Discipline in a Pluralistic Society," Direction XII (April 1983), pp. 15-27.

71 Ron Rempel, "Doing Theology Out in the Open," Mennonite Reporter, September 19, 1983, p. 6.

72 Sawatsky, Mennonite Reporter, September 19, 1983, supplement, p. 3.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Wally Kroeker, "How Should We Then Lead?" The Christian Leader, June 3, 1980, pp. 2-8; see also Harold Jantz, "Healing the Church-Pastor Rift," Mennonite Brethren Herald, June 27, 1980, pp. 24-25.

76 As cited by Wally Kroeker, "Do We Need Another June Reform?" The Christian Leader, February 8, 1983, p. 6.

77 Ibid.

78 Donald Bridges and David Phypers, The Water That Divides (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

79 Document of Secession as found in Toews' History, p. 34.

80 Ibid., p. 55.

81 Ibid., p. 56.

82 Ibid.

83. Ibid., p. 366.

84 Ibid., p. 55.

85 Albert W. Wardin, Jr., "Baptist Influences on Mennonite Brethren With an Emphasis on the Practice of Immersion," Direction VIII (October 1979), pp. 35-36.

86 Ibid.

87 A.E. Janzen and Herbert Giesbrecht, We Recommend . . . Recommendations and Resolutions of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, 1978), p. 15.

88 Ibid., pp. 89-90.

89 Ibid., p. 90.

90 Ibid., p. 93.

91 Ibid., p. 255.

92 Yearbook: 68th Convention The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Richmond, B.C., July 6-10, 1979, p. 53.

93 "Moving Ahead While Looking Back," Mennonite Brethren Herald, August 28, 1981, p. 5.

94 Ibid.

95 Yearbook: 55th Session General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, St. Catharines, Ontario, August 7-11, 1981, p. 7 & p. 12.

96 Wes Kroeker, "Uniform Uniformity, Please," The Christian Leader, February 8, 1983, p. 11.

97 Ibid.

98 Henry Poettcker, A Study on Baptism (Newton: Faith & Life Press, 1963), p. 23.

99 Our Mode of Baptism--Its Basis and Validity, pamphlet prepared by the Committee on the Ministry, Newton, Kansas, January, 1956, reprint, 1959, pp. 3-4.

100 Poettcker, p. 14.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 24.

103 Ibid., p. 15.

104 In his article on water baptism in The Christian Leader, August 26, 1980, David Ewert writes: "Nothing specifically is said in the New Testament about the mode of baptism." p. 4.

105 Jeschke, Believers Baptism, p. 130.

106 The Believers' Church, p. 95. In his address, Ed G. Kaufman lists some non-Mennonite ideas and practices which had caused dissension in G.C. congregations, i.e., child evangelism, eternal security, dispensationalism, materialistic millennial interpretations, episcopalian church chancel arrangement, various Calvinistic and Fundamentalistic interpretations of Scripture, as well as materialistic influences and trends toward worldliness and secularization--see *ibid.*, p. 108.

107 Toews, History, p. 377.

108 Paul Toews, "Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges: A Response to Cultural Transitions?" Mennonite Quarterly Review LVII (July 1983): 244.

109 J.B. Toews, "The Mennonite Brethren Church," The Mennonite, August 2, 1983, p. 366. For a fuller treatment, see J.B. Toews, "The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology," Direction X (July 1981): 20-29.

110 Cf. Walter Unger, "Giving Up on the Future," Mennonite Brethren Herald, March 11, 1983, p. 25.

111 Neufeld, p. 17.

112 Minutes of the Annual Convention of the B.C. Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, June 12, 1982, Fraserview M.B. Church, Richmond, B.C., also including Special Convention of the B.C. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, March 13, 1982, East Aldergrove M.B. Church, and Joint Convention of the B.C. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and Conference of Mennonites, June 11, 1982, Fraserview M.B. Church, Richmond, B.C., pp. 42-43.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 13. C.B.I.'s Confession of Faith is found on p. 28.

115 There has been a history of M.B.-G.C. cooperation in B.C. ranging from joint evangelistic crusades to joint operation of the Mennonite Educational Institute (grades 8 to 12), retirement and intermediate care centers and more recently the Clearbrook Community Center, operated by the M.B./G.C. Golden Age Society. A key theological contribution, as far as M.B.'s were concerned, was the strong paper in favor of the C.B.I. model presented by J.A. Toews to the M.B. Board of Reference and Counsel on November 23, 1972--"Doctrinal Implications of Inter-Mennonite Cooperation at the Columbia Bible Institute."

116 Roy Just, "Common Theological Base Makes Cooperation Possible," Mennonite Reporter, October 18, 1982, p. 14.

117 *Ibid.*

## COLUMBIA BIBLE INSTITUTE

CONFESSION OF FAITH

1. We believe that the whole Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God and that it is the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and life.
2. We believe that there is one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary and that He is true God and true man.
4. We believe that the Holy Spirit is a Person; that He is God, co-equal with the Father and the Son; that He convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgement; that He regenerates and indwells the believer and is his constant teacher and guide; and that He provides the enabling power for victorious living and dedicated service under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
5. We believe that man was created in the image of God; that he sinned and thereby incurred for himself and for the whole human race both physical and spiritual death, the essence of which is separation from God.
6. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for Man's sins and that all who receive Him have the forgiveness of sins through His blood.
7. We believe that Christ arose bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven where He is now the believer's High Priest and Advocate. He now rules over all things in heaven and on earth.
8. We believe that each individual must experience a personal regeneration, being born again of the Holy Spirit by the Word of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, thereby becoming a child of God.
9. We believe that the church, instituted by Christ, consists of all true believers whose supreme mission in this age is to make disciples of all nations.
10. We believe that the ordinances of the church are water baptism upon personal confession of faith in Christ and the Lord's Supper whereof we partake in remembrance of Christ.
11. We believe that a life of discipleship in conforming to the teachings of Christ in the Scriptures is an essential evidence of living faith and effective service, including non-resistance to evil by carnal means, the exercise of love, and the resolute abandonment of the use of violence, including warfare. We believe that the Christian life will, of necessity, express itself in non-conformity to the world in life and conduct.
12. We believe that the imminent return of Christ from heaven will be personal and visible and that He will judge the living and the dead.
13. We believe that there will be a bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust, with a state of everlasting blessedness for the just and a state of everlasting punishment for the unjust.

For a complete statement of faith see the Confession of Faith of General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and/or the Confession of Faith of the General Conference Mennonite Church.