



Katie Funk Wiebe
103 East B
Hillsboro, KS 67063

The New Mennonite Brethren: In But Still Out?

Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies,
Winnipeg, Man.

What is a new Mennonite Brethren?

The term "new MB" is not unique to our denomination, but is used also by other denominations and may be an adaptation of the disparaging French term "nouveau riche," meaning a person who is newly rich. The newly rich may have as much money as those who were born into it, but they have not acquired the social graces of the rich, inherited only through blood lines. The nouveau riche are expected to make faux pas in social settings for they were not in the manor born.

When the term "new Mennonite Brethren" is used of newcomers to the Mennonite Brethren fold, some of the connotations of the French term hold. Despite the view that all Mennonite Brethren have come in through the door of the new birth, the assumption frequently is that the new MBs, even though they are born-again believers, are not part of the original blue-blooded body with the full name and pedigree, but were grafted in.

Nelda Burdett interviewed eight couples in California about their decision to leave or to remain with the Mennonite Brethren Church. While the new MBs respected the Mennonite Brethren emphasis on family, clean living and good relationships, they left because they "were not a member of the club." They were "told they didn't belong" and "felt less and less a part." Another comment was that they felt they were visiting someone else's family. "We left," stated one person "because we had to provide an atmosphere for our children that says, 'For me to live is Christ,' not, 'for me to live is Mennonite Brethren'" (6-7). The ethnic component was too strong in these congregations for these new MBs. So they voted with their feet.

New Mennonite Brethren are nevertheless becoming part of the church. They are coming into the church by conversion and baptism and also by transfer from other denominations. The concern of this paper is to show how our faith, and particularly our theological culture, both helps and hinders the new Mennonite Brethren to feel at home as Mennonite Brethren. To find out where and how the new MBs fit into the conference structures and activities, I worked with data provided by the Mennonite Brethren Herald and the Canadian Conference Yearbooks. The Mennonite Brethren Herald, since its inception, has published records of births, deaths, and baptisms as these were sent to the editor. Although these data are obviously incomplete, they do indicate trends taking place in the church.

Because Mennonite Brethren traditionally have been a closed community, requiring young people to marry within the church, an examination of names is one way of tracing what has happened within the church. Alan Peters writes in "The Impact of the Family in Mennonite History" that we have

the odd and somewhat embarrassing situation that certain names are described as "Mennonite" names, and persons are labelled as Mennonites because of the names they carry. This is particularly "strange for a religious movement which was founded upon the belief that faith is an individual's personal response to God, and never an inherited quality." Although the Mennonite Brethren church was founded by only a few families, there was soon a willingness to accept particular persons of non-Mennonite background into the fold, but also those of German background. Lange is a German Catholic name, and Seibel, Faul, Lautt, Ollenburger and Leppky are German Lutheran and Pietist names, states Peters (74-81).

After this period the register of names remains fairly consistent in the Mennonite Brethren church until the early 1970s when Anglo-Saxon, French, Scottish and other nationalities appear. For my tabulations I counted all names in the lists of deaths, births, marriages and baptisms as reported to the Mennonite Brethren Herald from 1962 to 1985 that would not have appeared on the original Mennonite Brethren church registers, such as those mentioned in P.M. Friesen's history and similar books. Some of this required an arbitrary judgment on my part, for I found it difficult at times to distinguish between a strictly Germanic name and a Russian Mennonite one.

An examination of this data makes clear that during the middle 1970s much change was taking place in the Canadian churches. We can no longer speak of "Mennonite Brethren names" and "non-Mennonite Brethren names" for since 1970 approximately one-fourth to one-half of all new members are from non-Mennonite background. (See Appendix A).

In the interval between the early 1860s and the 1970s why did these names seldom change? The main reason is that during its immigrant stage the Mennonite Brethren church in Canada remained largely a 19th century denomination until the 1970s, taking its theological, evangelical and social/moral cues from the 19th century Russian context that gave it birth.

Bill J. Leonard points out that the Southern Baptists face a similar problem, having also remained largely a 19th century denomination in a 20th century setting. He cites Southern Baptist regional paternalism as being so deep that newcomers have to be converted both to Jesus Christ and to southernness before becoming a Southern Baptist. At the 1985 convention, Southern white paternalism characterized almost every session. Absent from nearly every session were ethnic minorities, particularly blacks, although blacks represent a large percentage of the population in the Bible Belt, women, and even lay persons for prayer, scripture reading or music. No major addresses were given by ethnic persons and there were no women representatives in a denomination that prides itself on its evangelicism, its evangelism, and its assurance that God is on their side. He writes, "I was embarrassed to be a Southern Baptist -- embarrassed because we are too white, too powerful, too southern and too cocksure that God is on our side" (683).

Ambiguity of Terminology

In what ways are Mennonite Brethren still a 19th century denomination? One such factor preventing newcomers from entering the church originated in

the Russian context and has to do with the ambiguity related to terms such as evangelism and extension, missions and home missions. We do evangelism within our own congregations, while hoping and praying we are also doing extension outside them. We also do missions overseas or at a distance from us while convinced we are fulfilled the "Judea" part of the Great Commission.

This pattern of thinking that the term "evangelism" covered all mission obligations began in Russia in the 19th century. The first members came from the Mennonite church, almost the only avenue of growth, for to proselytize the Russians was against the laws of the state. The first new MBs outside of the initial eighteen families were therefore relatives, Mennonite friends and neighbors who were attracted by their spiritual vigor.

From 1860 to the end of 1865 the church evangelized and baptized 299 persons, almost 50 a year; as already mentioned some were Lutherans and Russians, with twenty colonists of Old-Danzig baptized in 1864 and some settlers of Rohrbach evangelized (Peters 54). By 1914 one-fourth of the whole Russian Mennonite population was Mennonite Brethren (Jacob J. Toews, 144-5). Missionary work (Zeltmission) among the Russians was continued as circumstances permitted, but these converts did not become Mennonite Brethren (147) but instead were advised to join the Baptist church. By 1925 almost 40 percent of the population in the daughter colonies belonged to the Mennonite Brethren (15.5 percent in the mother settlements of the Ukraine), growth due to evangelizing the Mennonite Church.

New Mennonite Brethren at this point in history were therefore people of the same ethnic stock, sometimes of the same community, and often of the same family line. Clarence Hiebert writes that the same pattern of evangelizing Mennonite immigrants continued in America. At the Hamilton/York County congregation in Nebraska, 150 were baptized within ten years, many of them from the "other" Mennonites. The 34 members constituting the 1882 charter membership of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren church were all from the French Creek Johannestal Mennonite group (126).

In Canada recommendations to the conference indicate that the term "evangelism" clearly clings to the meaning of work within the church and "missions" to work beyond the MB congregations. Extension is not mentioned much. The 1969 Canadian Conference Yearbook states that the duty of the Board of Evangelism is to initiate, promote and strengthen the work of evangelism in local churches and be responsible for radio and other mass communications. Bringing new converts into the established churches has not been a primary goal. Like other church groups in ordinary face-to-face groupings in our religious life, Mennonite Brethren have associated largely with one another and ignored outsiders or used mass media to reach them.

Early home mission efforts were directed to the Comanche Indians at Post Oak, near Lawton, Oklahoma (listed under the heading of "Forward Steps in Foreign Missions" in John H. Lohrenz's The Mennonite Brethren Church), to the Jews in Winnipeg, to the Russians in North Dakota and Saskatchewan, and later to the Sioux Indians in South Dakota (Pine Ridge) and the Indians of British Columbia. Converts were expected to develop their own churches, and even if called Mennonite Brethren were not considered "real Mennonite Brethren" to whom one entrusted the work of the kingdom of God.

Efforts after World War 2 were directed to the Japanese of San Joaquin Valley in California and at Port Edward, British Columbia, the Hispanics of South Texas and the French in Quebec, and through city mission work to the poor, the skidrow derelicts, the sick and the imprisoned. Reports of these mission activities, occasionally referred to as evangelism or extension, but more often as mission work, at times list the number of people spoken to, the number of services, the pieces of literature distributed, and so forth, and even the number of "souls saved" and in some cases number of people baptized, but not usually the number added to the Mennonite Brethren church -- the new Mennonite Brethren.

A.J. Klassen reveals in a graph in The Church in Missions that between 1890 and 1966 a period of 76 years, the Mennonite Brethren home missions effort in two city missions (Minneapolis and Winnipeg) and the mission to the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma had brought 80 members into the church, or approximately one person per year (402). Because the members of the target group of city missions and ethnic ministries were primarily social outcasts and the membership of the converts from such efforts were kept to churches without full status in the conference, the results were minimal. To be converted and be baptized did not yet mean one was an MB.

Not until the U.S. Conference instituted the program Decade of Enlargement in 1960s was the term "evangelism" used aggressively for outreach in the community, but enthusiasm for the program soon waned. In Canada, the Kanadier through the Western Children's Mission, which later became the M.B. Mission of Saskatchewan, used the word to reach out to the community, but basically its workers were doing "foreign" missionary work with no aggressive attempt to build churches and bring the new converts into the fellowship of the church. Russlaender were stimulated by Canadian MBs to become more concerned about the unconverted living close by.

Evangelism of those in the immediate vicinity of the Mennonite Brethren who were not members of the Mennonite constituency did not become a serious concern until the church was nearly a century old, although the assumption was that the church was meeting the challenge of evangelism of people of non-Mennonite background. Because we were doing missions abroad and in distant places in America, it seems clear that Mennonite Brethren never consciously intended to bring people from the immediate community into the church of the kind that would sit on the same pew with them year in and year out and share in the full work of the church -- preaching, making decisions about polity and theology, and using their spiritual gifts in the building up of the body of Christ. Language was of course one barrier; the fear that the dominant ethnic group might not remain in control may have been another.

Elmer Martens has done an excellent study on the work of the Mennonite Brethren in mission in this country, surveying the different types of outreach, people involved and size of budgets devoted to this effort. He concludes that one of the reasons for the slow growth in the home mission outreach between 1870 and 1930 is that energies were necessarily concentrated on building the local congregations and in reaching the unsaved within the larger church family (190) and that the high "enthusiasm for mission activity abroad gave the constituency a feeling of meeting its obligations spiritually at home" (190). What new Mennonite Brethren there were existed in small isolated ethnic groups, generally at a distance from

Mennonite Brethren congregations of Russian Mennonite stock. Martens and others have posited the reason for this lack in that the Mennonite Brethren church represents a cultural group with a particular European tradition which found assimilation of converts a problem because of language barriers, cultural differences, "a cliquish attitude, intolerance of immaturity, or fear of change" which are based on the sins of pride and lovelessness (198).

Yet we are told repeatedly that evangelism has molded the faith of the Mennonite Brethren and is a basic ingredient in its understanding of the nature of the church and considered as one of our distinctives. In J.A. Toews' The History of the Mennonite Brethren Church the word "evangelism" is indexed 43 times, but the reference is most often to efforts on behalf of those already in the Mennonite Brethren community. As one of Burdett's interviewees said, "Our visitors are all Mennonite Brethren." The word "extension," which Mennonite Brethren use to refer to evangelistic work just beyond their own borders, is not indexed at all.

Though we have succeeded well in foreign missions and have been evangelical in the classic sense, we have not been evangelistic until recent decades in the sense of vigorously extending ourselves in the immediate vicinity. In the 1970s, however, the Canadian Mennonite Brethren church, like its counterparts in society, was affected by the contemporary church renewal movements as well as by other factors, and members were awakened to the need to be evangelistic as well as evangelical with regard to people in the immediate neighborhood. Group boundaries were cautiously extended. (See Appendix A)

Conversion and Baptism by Immersion Are the Key to Admittance

A second reason people of other backgrounds find entry into the Mennonite Brethren world hard and we find it difficult to acknowledge them freely has to do with the fact that we have added a requirement to the new birth as the basis for becoming a member. Southern Baptists may have added southernness with its strong doses of racial paternalism to their membership requirements. Over the years, Mennonite Brethren have developed a subconscious formula for membership, or a set of hoops, which include a restrictive version of conversion, which must be followed by baptism by immersion and sometimes marriage to an immersed believer. If candidates for membership can jump through all the hoops, they can become a full-fledged MB even though conversion alone is acknowledged as the way to Christ.

Baptism by immersion is a much-debated issue in Mennonite Brethren circles, with some leaders determined to keep it a basic principle on which MBs will not budge because to them it represents better than all other baptismal forms the believer's participation in Jesus' death and resurrection to a new life. But budge we have.

The basis for this deeprooted feeling also goes back to Russia and the ecclesiastical models developed in Prussia and later in Russia, which used baptism as a way of exercising control over other groups. Mennonite Brethren inherited an attitude toward baptism and a history of disagreement regarding baptism and membership beginning with the Prussian period. Frisians were more acccommodating in their views of baptism and membership

than the Flemish. In case of marriage members of one group had to be rebaptized to be accepted by the other (Bekker 14, 99).

Baptism, marriage and conversion were closely intertwined during the early history of the Mennonites in Russia. Empress Catherine wanted the various Mennonites to be united in one church and to have the liberty to intermarry. To retain their property, Mennonites in 1851 adopted a survivalist stance, permitting no mixed marriages, for if young people married outside the faith, their property fell into the hands of strangers, and the Mennonites could not acquire more land without losing their right to military exemption.

Water baptism by immersion was stressed as a condition for membership and fellowship by the Chortitza-Einlage Mennonite Brethren church in late 1861 and early 1862. After 1860 Mennonite Brethren in Russia were faced with the problem of what to do with non-baptized children who wanted to be married. One opinion was to "Let them be married in the Mennonite church! Why bother with outsiders?" (Friesen 478) They finally agreed that to keep the couple from the hypocritical baptism of which MBs were accusing the mother church, the Mennonite Brethren minister could marry them if the couple promised to go to church and be good.

During these years Baptist preachers were welcomed in Brethren meeting houses, writes John B. Toews, while Mennonite ministers generally were not. Brethren admitted Baptist believers to communion services on the basis of their immersion but continued to debate the admissibility of believing Mennonites baptized by sprinkling (49). Baptized Baptists were accepted in Brethren congregations without baptism while adults baptized on faith in the Old Church still had to be immersed (50). Immersion became the sieve to determine with whom they wanted to develop amiable relations and which groups they kept at a distance. "Religious exactness and the occasional sense of moral superiority made the Brethren unapproachable," he writes (56). "Immersion continued to be viewed as the only correct baptismal mode, the form for Bekehrung remained tightly prescribed, and communion services admitted immersed believers only" (58). Giesbrecht adds that the "purist mentality hardened the convictions of many early MBs on the question concerning the proper mode of baptism. Any deviation was looked upon with suspicion, even ill will. He quotes B.B. Janz: "Man beschloss unter diesen Einfluss, die Tauchtaufe zum Schlagbaum gegen andere Glaeubige zu machen" (12).

In 1895 in Russia the regulation forbidding Mennonite Brethren marrying non-Mennonite Brethren without being excommunicated was dropped and each case was to be considered individually, yet when my parents married (my father was Mennonite Brethren and my mother was an immersed Allianz), my father was excommunicated. But the issue was not clarified in America for many years. In 1889 a conference resolution stated that only baptized believers should marry and be married inside the church. Marriage outside the church could take place only if to an immersed believer. In 1898 the General Conference modified its original position only slightly. An MB could marry outside the church only if "the respective person qualified to be received into (MB) church membership through confession of faith," which meant being an immersed believer. The underlying aim here seems to stress the difference with the old "decadent" church.

In 1930 a motion passed whereby the member could remain in the church in good standing if the other person (unimmersed) was found to be a child of God, but was rejected six years later and the 1898 position reaffirmed. Not until 1954 were persons baptized upon their faith by a different mode seriously considered as candidates for membership. In 1957 non-immersed believers wanting to become Mennonite Brethren were advised to be baptized by immersion or to stay in their own church or to shift to a church with which they agreed. The church during the forties and fifties seemed more ready to accept child conversion followed by baptism by immersion than adult conversion and sprinkling.

In 1963 non-immersed believers baptized by another mode were accepted with restrictions by the General Conference. In Canada this motion to receive non-immersed believers with the understanding that as they became open to greater light, they would be baptized, was defeated 190 to 107 (only 64%) the first time it was presented. In another six years non-immersed members were allowed to transfer to other MB churches by letter. In 1969 the General Conference expressed contrition regarding self-righteousness and legalistic attitudes regarding membership restrictions. By 1972 non-immersed members were allowed to transfer to other Mennonite Brethren churches by letter, accepted in 1973 by the Canadian Conference.

In 1979 baptism by immersion was discussed as a recommendation for church workers. Immersion still remains a concern with some persons with regard to the validity of ordination. The depth of feeling related to baptism by immersion surfaced this summer at the Waterloo conference when it became clear that some church leaders believed that if an MB married a Conference of Mennonites in Canada member (non-immersed), he or she was automatically dismissed. G.H. Lohrenz in Storm-tossed writes that one southern Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren minister in the 1920s called the other forms of baptism the invention of the devil and his greatest triumph (168) on a par with bloodshed, immorality and other crimes.

Though immersion has been strongly promoted as a doctrinal distinctive, it has been used by Mennonite Brethren to maintain its boundaries and keep unwanted Christians out, particularly other Mennonites. The topic has at times become of greater concern than that conversion and baptism have become a routinized rite of entry into the church and that many of our congregations have a fairly standardized procedure for becoming a church member (Kyle, 100). The dropping of the requirement of baptism by immersion as the only way members of other denominations could join the church in 1973 may have been an additional factor in the increase in the number of people of other denominations transferring to become new MBs (see Appendix A). Anecdotal evidence seems to support this.

The German Language Maintenance Efforts

Another strong cultural factor originating in the 19th century preventing outsiders from joining our ranks has been the use of the German language. The maintenance of the German language was an item on a number of Canadian Conference agendas beginning with 1950 when its severe erosion became apparent. A Committee for the Nurture of German language was elected and given a budget of \$1,000 to come up with plans to promote its use. The concern of this committee was the loss of communication and unity regarding spiritual matters between the generations. By 1963 it no longer

reported to the conference. Yearbooks were being written in English and translated into German and an English periodical Mennonite Brethren Herald was being published. One of the biggest barriers to evangelizing the community and opening the way for new MBs had come down. J.A. Toews states that dropping German increased evangelistic efforts but also increased the number of marriages between MBs and other evangelicals (330), and affected denominational loyalty.

The Official "Shoes" of a Mennonite Brethren

Hubert Brown writes in Black and Mennonite that to a black person of the earlier more oppressed era, shoes symbolized acceptance into the family of God. What symbol represents acceptance to new Mennonite Brethren? MB identity has been strongly tied to conference identity, to the larger "brotherhood." Yet one hears repeatedly of Mennonite Brethren leaving our fellowship for other denominations to become leaders there. That alone should give us a clue as to some of the difficulties newcomers, and possibly also long-time members, face. Instead of moving into the phase of acculturation in which the ethnic group looks outward and embraces other groups, many of our members (new and old) leave to embrace other groups.

D.E. Redekop in the 1982 Canadian Conference address stated that in his opinion Mennonite Brethren strengths were our young people, our singing, Sunday school work, strong preaching, and strong families. The main weakness as he saw it then was the under-utilization of resources and abilities (6-8). Members have gifts that are not being used and some gifts and functions are considered more worthy than others. "Shoes" for a full-fledged Mennonite Brethren has been achieving first the status of minister or missionary, and then being elected to some office, either in the local congregation, but in particular on a conference board or committee. And it helps to be male. A woman receives shoes when she becomes a missionary.

Henry Schmidt adds to Redekop's statement by quoting new members as saying: "I know I'm wanted when I know I'm needed." He argues that commitment grows by involvement. The more quickly a church can respond to new persons by opening up service opportunities, the sooner new members will feel a part of the family. Yet having members serve doesn't always take place, he says, because most of the tasks in the church are performed by a few people. Most churches are not prepared to create enough new tasks beyond the four walls of the church, so new members -- those with the greatest zeal and likely the most non-church contacts -- remain unmobilized, and qualification for church boards is frequently linked to tenure of church membership (383). Some leave.

Appendix B shows the extent to which members with non-traditional names have been acknowledged as having gifts and been asked to serve within the Canadian conference. Though the new MBs began entering the church in the early seventies, about 12 to 15 years ago, they have never been present in large number as delegates to the Canadian Conference sessions, the place where the church as a representative body works and worships together for the sake of the entire membership. The total number of delegates was usually between 350 in early years and more than 500 in the later ones.

Appendix C shows that although some non-traditional names appear after

1970 as local church workers, according to yearbook lists, their total number is small compared to the total number of church workers, which in 1980 was about 1,970. Also, it should be noted that this figure (210 in 1980) includes workers in congregations such as the Quebec churches or other totally non-English speaking churches in Canada and names of missionaries, often with non-ethnic names, supported under non-MB agencies.

Appendix D is even more revealing. If, as Alan Peters states that to grow we need to be willing to let our daughters marry those of other backgrounds, we also need to be willing to let new MBs become part of the decision-making process of the church at all levels. This chart shows that participation in conference structures by those from other backgrounds has been extremely limited. We do not trust new MBs with decision-making.

Appendix E, which is a survey of church workers and others commemorated at conferences, shows that since 1950 few persons with non-traditional names have been included in the memorial service. At first only male ministers, deacons and missionaries were recognized as church workers, then female missionaries were added, then wives and persons who had given valuable service, and finally men and women of ethnic or non-ethnic stock, although the latter in only limited numbers. This list represents the people who are formally recognized as having worn shoes.

Leaving the Mennonite Brethren Family

A survey of the literature written by and about Canadian Mennonite Brethren (new MBs as well as others) in recent years often refers to the numbers of church members (new and old) transferring out. One reason given is that they are more concerned with upward economic mobility than with church loyalty. I see other reasons for this exodus, one having to do with our strong Mennonite Brethren emphasis on individualism. In the years since the Mennonite Brethren church began, it has stressed conversion as an intensely personal experience between the individual and God. Missions rhetoric has also stressed that the individual should answer the call of God to become part of denominational outreach in the mission program which provides ways to channel this individualism.

On the other hand, although the church has always thought of itself as a brotherhood, or a body, it has confused theological and non-theological perceptions of the term "brotherhood." The non-theological glue of brotherhood came with the Russian territory -- language, kinship ties, foods, patriarchalism, and common experiences. The theological bonds of brotherhood were not nurtured to the same degree, for it wasn't necessary. When someone spoke of the "brotherhood" it evoked strong warm feelings about shared joys and sorrows and shared hopes. What the term meant was so taken for granted that few people could have defined it accurately. Its in-house meaning restricted the circle of the elect severely to the biological members, primarily male; its hoped-for meaning attempted to broaden the circle to all adherents but could not.

In recent years we have published much on missions, biography, some on nonresistance and conversion, but little on the teaching of peoplehood, a covenanting body of Christ that includes all races, both sexes, all ages,

all social levels. So without a strong theology of peoplehood, taught, modeled, preached, the original meaning of the term "brotherhood" as it was used in Russia competes with the present goals of strong body life. Yet our strong emphasis on individualism, derived both from our church teaching and from the spirit of the age prompts members to exercise their autonomy to move where economic opportunities beckon.

Even before the language barrier dropped, Mennonite Brethren, well taught regarding the need for personal outreach, began transferring to evangelical churches where evangelism meant witnessing for Christ to the unchurched in the immediate community. Anyone who was a Mennonite Brethren young adult in Canada during the 1950s and 60s knows only too well the tremendous conflict when caught between the attractiveness of what seemed like a biblical appeal from denominations like the Christian and Missionary Alliance and other churches to witness to all people, yet wanting to be loyal to a denomination that said we were evangelistic but that couldn't assimilate new MBs.

People continue to transfer. Why? Nancy Ammerman writes that when the level of education increases (as it has in our Mennonite Brethren congregations), the people caught in the middle, those who have not moved with the more educated people yet aren't satisfied with the theology they grew up with, are more likely to be fundamentalists than are any other demographic group. Fundamentalists are less active in routine denominational meetings, less likely to get key denominational papers, less likely to use denominational Sunday school materials, more likely to be dissatisfied with the denomination, its boards and agencies, and to give less money to the budget. They approach conflict differently, being more ready to break away because they don't think of the conference as a family. Yet they are active in fundamentalist groups and rallies, have vision and initiative, and are willing to think about leaving their own group for it (486-7).

This scenario fits some Mennonite Brethren who leave through the backdoor. They express their dissatisfaction with comments like these gathered in a survey of Mennonite Brethren before I wrote Who Are the Mennonite Brethren?: "Let's remember that the Mennonites are not God's chosen people and that we are members of a much larger body of Christians as well." "Why must we be so concerned about ourselves as MBs rather than as Christians?" "Christian is more important than Mennonite." "I am more concerned about being evangelical than I am about being Mennonite." "People who come to our community, believers or unbelievers, would hopefully come to our church because of our evangelical doctrinal understandings and our commitment to God's Word and not primarily because of our MB distinctives. They are not our drawing card." As a denomination we have not caught the theological loyalty of such members. If they stay in our midst, they look for release from an uncomfortable yoke by rejecting Mennonite Brethren distinctives and highlighting those they prefer. In 1983 the Conference Yearbook listed 56 congregations that did not use the term Mennonite Brethren to identify themselves. This number increased to 73 in 1984.

The Paternalism of Mennonite Brethren

Another factor hindering assimilation of new Mennonite Brethren has been our paternalism, particularly our reluctance to accept the view that the

building of God's kingdom requires both men and women, also derived from our Russian heritage. I have only anecdotal evidence of young women leaving the church or not being interested in becoming a Mennonite Brethren because it does not afford them opportunities for involvement. When some of them speak to me they mention that they are fully involved in careers, but not in church work because it has no openings for their particular gifts. We are losing a significant number of well-qualified women to other denominations, to para-church organizations, and even more so to non-involved membership in the Mennonite Brethren church.

Women can be said to be new MBs, for they are slowly becoming visible in the church. In 1975 though opposing ordination of women on the grounds that God's creation order was not abrogated by redemption, the Canadian Conference agreed to allow women to be elected as delegates to conferences and to church and conference boards and committees other than the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns or the Board of Reference and Council or its equivalent, by an overwhelming vote of 339 to 20 (Yearbook, 1975, p.15). Women, however, were already flocking to conferences in 1973 and 1974, showing their readiness to be admitted.

Yet as I have pointed out in my article "Mennonite Brethren Women: Images and Realities of the Early Years" women are absent from the pages of our history books. One would hardly guess that there were women among the brethren. Delbert Wiens states that the index to J. A. Toews' history names ten women: six missionaries, three wrote something and one was Catherine II. "Women were rarities in the Mennonite communities, existing only as a Mrs. So-and-So unless she was a missionary or had worked on a book. The man spoke when we spoke 'officially' in and of the church and to the world, unless the audience consisted of 'benighted heathen'" (49). Women were encouraged to become missionaries in overseas countries, where they could preach, teach, lead an institution -- activities not acceptable for a woman in the home church. The Missionary Album of 1954 shows that more than 80 women at the time were ordained, of which half were single, an ordination valid only for an overseas location. Women missionaries were ordained until 1957, when the conference, following the generally conservative stance of the secular world toward women's roles after World War 2, rescinded ordination for women and changed it to a commissioning.

Appendix B shows that women delegates to the Canadian conference totalled almost half the total number in 1982, the last year this information appeared in the yearbook. Appendix E reveals the early attitude that women were only full-fledged church workers worthy to be honored if they were missionaries, which attitude changed with time to include wives of ministers and deacons. In recent years they are listed as "women."

Appendix D shows that even though the official fences have been lowered to allow women to be elected to all committees except a few, they are still not included in the same proportion as they are in the total church membership (usually well over half).

How does this relate to the new MBs? Our attitude toward women is an aspect of our paternalistic attitude toward weaker, less powerful groups or segments in our midst. Minority members have even fewer opportunities than women of using their gifts in church and conference structures.

Conclusions

1. Let us celebrate our ethnic diversity. The new Mennonite Brethren have arrived. We can no longer think of Mennonite names and non-Mennonite names. New Mennonite Brethren can benefit us. Gordon Nickel in a recent article emphasizes that "New Mennonites Enrich Us all," by forcing us to focus on faith and to get culture in perspective and to do the work of the church more effectively (4). Pastor Alex Campbell states that part of the reason he is involved in the MB church is that it has "strength and potential in helping to reach Canada for Jesus Christ" (Coggins 15).

New MBs encourage us to hold more dearly those central beliefs that Mennonites of all cultural backgrounds can cherish and help ethnic Mennonites to make peace with their past by becoming aware of other cultural backgrounds. They also stimulate older Mennonites to "new questioning, interest and commitment." The retelling of our historical/spiritual pilgrimage develops a new appreciation of it for ourselves and forces old Mennos to include the realities of contemporary urban life and become bolder in service and witness (Nickel 4).

2. What will help new MBs feel at home, not just as members of a middle class church with generic Christian commitments, but at home as Mennonite Brethren with our theology with its weaknesses and strengths? They need to know our history which tells of our struggle for mission in America, how our adopted culture has aided our efforts and how it has impeded them. We will have to become specific about how clergy and laity, congregations and conferences, men and women, Russian Mennonites and non-Europeans were shaped by that sense of mission and shaped it. We need to keep telling that story and then let those who come to us tell their story.

3. To find our way into the 21st century we need to formulate a solid hermeneutic for evangelism, one which we have earned the right to engage in, while responding to social problems of racism, sexism, poverty and war. We will need to model a reconciled international, interracial, interethnic community by the way we affirm the diversity of gifts for all members, male and female, all races and social backgrounds.

4. We need a stronger teaching on the theology of peoplehood coupled with a deliberate effort to discard terms such as "brotherhood" and maybe even "brethren," which are clearly 19th century terms and have changed meaning in our time.

5. We should clarify our understanding of symbols as they relate to baptism by immersion.

6. We need clearer and stronger teaching regard the relationship of our wealth and our faith.

APPENDIX A

Increase in number of non-traditional (non-ethnic Mennonite) names as reported in the Mennonite Brethren Herald. Column A represents the number of non-traditional names for each category, column B the total number reported.

| Year | Births | | Deaths | | Marriages | | Baptisms, Transfers (all kinds) | |
|------|--------|-----|--------|-----|-----------|-----|---------------------------------|-----|
| | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B |
| 1985 | 178 | 538 | 16 | 165 | 159 | 280 | 397 | 818 |
| 1980 | 113 | 424 | 13 | 127 | 70 | 146 | 230 | 669 |
| 1975 | 58 | 279 | 6 | 113 | 48 | 127 | 133 | 503 |
| 1970 | 32 | 280 | 3 | 79 | 42 | 129 | 63 | 408 |
| 1965 | 23 | 258 | 7 | 72 | 19 | 84 | 22 | 157 |
| 1962 | 14 | 209 | 3 | 49 | 17 | 90 | 13 | 108 |

The figures for births represent only those in which the husband's name is a non-traditional Mennonite name.

APPENDIX B

Increase in number of delegates to conferences with non-traditional (non-ethnic) Mennonite names and those who were women. After 1982 the names of delegates were not listed. The number of women is on the conservative side, for they could not be counted if they used only initials to register.

| Year | Non-trad. Name | Women |
|------|----------------|-------|
| 1982 | 42 | 185 |
| 1981 | 35 | 144 |
| 1980 | 27 | 157 |
| 1979 | 28 | 155 |
| 1978 | 16 | 162 |
| 1977 | 17 | 81 |
| 1976 | 15 | 103 |
| 1975 | 12 | 105 |
| 1974 | 9 | 99 |
| 1973 | 10 | 46 |
| 1972 | | |
| 1971 | 8 | 11 |
| 1970 | 7 | 20 |
| 1969 | 6 | 5 |
| 1968 | 6 | 3 |
| 1967 | 3 | 0 |
| 1966 | 1 (?) | 0 |
| 1965 | 2 (?) | 0 |
| 1964 | 0 | 0 |
| 1962 | 0 | 0 |
| 1961 | 1 | 0 |
| 1960 | 0 | 0 |
| 1959 | 1 | 0 |

The non-ethnic names appearing before 1967 were usually Germanic.

APPENDIX C

Increase in number of local church workers with non-traditional (non ethnic-Mennonite) names as listed in Canadian Conference Yearbooks. This information was not given in later years. This number includes workers in churches like the Quebec congregations and also church workers, such as missionaries serving in non-Mennonite Brethren mission societies. The actual number of local church workers would be considerably smaller if these two figures were omitted.

1980 210 (Total number of workers was approx. 1960-80).
1975 105
1970 65
1965 37
1961 17
1956 5 (mostly German names)
1950 1
1946 3

APPENDIX D

Increase in number of persons with non-traditional names and of women on Canadian Conference committees and boards. Column A refers to those with non-traditional names, Column B to the number of women members. The figures may actually be lower because it was difficult to determine at times which names were actually non-ethnic Mennonite.

APPENDIX E

Changes in the terminology describing persons commemorated in Memorial Services at the Canadian Conference as recorded in the yearbooks.

1985 -- "church leaders" -- 11 men and 5 women (four ordained ministers, one elder, and one woman had a non-traditional name (Tweedale).

1984 -- "church leaders" -- 9 men, 3 women (no non-ethnic names)

1983 -- "gave valuable service" -- 19 men, 10 women (4 non-traditional names) This is the first year that non-ethnic names appear.

1982 -- "church workers" -- 13 ministers and deacons, 1 female missionary, 1 wife

1981 -- "persons who had passed away during the year" -- 26 men, 21 women

1980 -- "leaders and workers" -- 10 deacons and ministers, 1 female missionary

1979 -- "church leaders" -- 11 pastors, deacons, conference workers, 2 women (wives of church workers)

1978 -- "church workers" -- 16 ministers, deacons, church members, missionary; 4 women (2 minister's wives, church member, deacon's wife)

1977 -- "those called home" -- 14 ministers, deacons and missionaries; 3 wives of ministers, church worker

1976 -- "rendered services" -- 9 men, 4 women, 6 children

1975 --

1974 --

1973 -- "deceased ministers and deacons" -- 8 ministers, 4 deacons

1971 -- "departed ministers and deacons" -- 8 ministers, 3 deacons

1970 -- "ministers and deacons who had died" -- 15 men

1969 -- "ministers and deacons" -- 7 ministers, 6 deacons

1967 -- "brethren" -- 6 men

1965 -- "church workers" -- 11 men (deacons, ministers, church members), 1 female missionary

1964 -- "brethren who had gone to be with the Lord" -- 7 ministers, deacons, choir leader

1963 -- 12 ministers and deacons

1961 -- "departed brethren" -- 10 men

1959 -- "brethren" -- 9 ministers, deacons, Bible teachers, missionary

1956 -- "verstorbenen Brüder" -- 10 men

1953 -- "abgeschiedenen Brüder" -- 5 men

1952 -- "Brüder die in der Öffentlichkeit tätig waren" -- 3 men

1950 -- "Konferenzarbeiter" -- 8 men (including one from a Russian mission) and one nurse from Muntauer

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