



*Mennonite Brethren*  
*Historical Society*  
*Newsletter*

Vol. VIII, No. 2  
September, 1986

FAITH AND CULTURE:

TOPICS OF NOVEMBER SYMPOSIUM

The Symposium on "Faith and Culture" being sponsored by the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies this fall, (November 14 and 15) promises to be a significant event. The topic is timely and the speakers are well-qualified to address this issue.

The question of what it means to be a Mennonite and how ones cultural distinctives enhance or detract from individual or corporate Christian faith will be addressed. The symposium should stimulate much discussion since this topic repeatedly keeps being raised within congregational and conference settings.

Most of the speakers are familiar to Mennonite Brethren in general. Perhaps less familiar is the featured speaker, Dr. James Urry of Wellington, New Zealand.

Dr. Urry comes with unique qualifications. He is an anthropologist whose two - volume doctoral dissertation, The Closed and the Open: Social and Religious Change amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1889) is a landmark study of the Mennonite community in Russia. Exciting and provocative, Dr. Urry will be certain to stimulate discussion with his views on the cultural and faith context of Mennonite Brethren in Russia.

No less stimulating will be the other speakers. Katie Funk Wiebe, well-known to most people through interesting columns and books as well as Dr. Jakob Loewen, missionary translator and anthropologist; will discuss how new M.B.'s are accepted into the church and how language can form cultural barriers to new Mennonite Brethren. Providing a philosophical understanding of the issue will be Dr. Delbert Wiens. The Sociological and historical study of the question will be provided by Dr. Peter Hamm and Dr. Paul Toews.

The Symposium is open to the general public. However, in order to give the planners of the Symposium some indication of how many people will attend, it is suggested that registrations be sent in at least two weeks in advance. The program and registration forms are located elsewhere in this issue.

MAKING MENNONITE ATHEISTS

In 1967 the "Department of Atheistic Literature," in Moscow, published a book entitled "Mennonites". This volume, written by Victor F. Krestjaninov, was part of a series of volumes entitled "Contemporary Religions". The purpose of this volume was

clearly to aid propagandists in their work among Mennonites in the Soviet Union.

It is quite revealing to read selections from this volume. One immediately notes how similar the language and methods of communist propagandists are to the language and methods of evangelical Mennonites. It seems that when one is intent upon persuading someone to accept a different point of view, methods and language are no respectors of religion...or was that a lack of religion.

The Centre for M.B. Studies acknowledges the able assistance of Rita Dirks in translating the following portion from Victor F. Krestjaninov's book. Rita is an M.A. student in Slavic Studies at the University of Manitoba. She is also employed in the Russian Department of M.B. Communications.

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The Peculiarities of Mennonite ideology, psychology and their activities dictate the necessity of various forms and methods of scientific atheistic education...

Let us take a look at the older Mennonites. In struggling with their religious convictions one can only secure positive results through the personal approach. Unfortunately, our observations tell us that old men and women usually are not included in the field of atheistic activities. One can sometimes hear them say: "What can you do with the old people, let them finish their lifetime." That is a mistake! One cannot, first of all, ignore the influence that grandfathers and grandmothers have on their grandchildren who are often left in their care by parents, sometimes exclusively. In almost all the families, where there are older sectarian-Mennonites, the children are not sent to Kindergartens and public playgrounds.

It is hard work to fight the religious prejudices of the elderly. Moreover, they are all uneducated people.

Individual work with aged  
sectarians might be more

successful if one can attract atheists of their own age who know the German language, particularly relatives — and neighbors. It would be easier and faster for them to find keys to the hearts and minds of believers to sow the seeds of doubt into the truths of religious dogma, to train them to have a more calm and trustful attitude in discussions regarding their religion. But most important in working with aged believers is to weaken their influence on children and teenagers. Here one has to find such arguments which would convince the aged people not to impose their own religious ideas on the growing generation.

One has to say that the experience of party, junior communists and trade union organizations in working with adherents of Mennonitism, is not yet great. However, in several places successful steps have been taken by atheists in making use of the methodology described above. Here are a few examples.

It is interesting to note the practice of propagandist atheists A.J. Fast and R.B. Frank in the F. Engels kolchos (collective farm) in the Znamenski region of the Altou territory. They know the inhabitants of the kolchoz settlements very well and, what's more important, they skillfully approach the believers and win their confidence.

They do not start the first discussions with questions about belief in God, but more often with a review of internal or international events or a story about developments in the territory or the kolchoz. Only gradually do they approach the subject of religion and its morals. For example, explaining the fact that in the biblical episode the "righteous" Lot took turns living with his daughters, visibly shocked the believing women. That conversation forced them to become thoughtful about the moral side of religion.

Such discussions A.J. Fast and R.B. Frank conduct in the German language, often in the believers homes. As chairman of the kolchoz, R.B. Frank regularly

listens to complaints and requests and gains the confidence of the people. And so, step by step, in the course of personal discussions, reading of newspapers, anti-religious stories, showing attention to daily needs, the propagandist have dissuaded the believers. As a result of such work, they were successful in pulling out more than 40 people from under the influence of the (Mennonite) sectarians in the F. Engles kolchoz.

We may also learn from another example. In the village of Nekeasov in the Altai territory a community of Mennonites, with minister A.J. Dyck at the head, had been active for a long time. The only readers at the library were the village intellectuals. The house wives thought that the reading of books and magazines was a useless thing. Here the teachers of the secondary school of the village Nekeasov, active members of the Komsomol organization, stepped forward to fight for the human being and against the influence of the sectarians...The library became the organized coordination centre of work of the village atheists with manager S.L. Bulenok in charge. Under her initiative a constantly active propaganda station was created. She established a rule; one must inform every propagandist about all the interesting material that enters the library, which can immediately be used in their atheistic work.

The propagandists of atheism, fixing their attention on a few homes (apartments) at a time, went to the homes of the believers. They did not start off the conversations with questions "about God and the harm of religion." To become closer to the believers they started to tell stories about interesting facts of the region, about nature, about events in the life of the country and about the studies of their children in school. After that the atheists started bringing with them interesting books, various magazines, down to children's literature. In the process of such free and easy conversations with believers the propagandists

became more aware of their needs, the spiritual life of the people, who through various circumstances of life became entangled in the nets of sectarianism.

The first thing that the propagandists were able to do was to arouse an interest in some believers, especially the young people, to read books in their own German language. The library satisfied their desires by extending their German collection to 180 copies.

At the same time they did not let the minister of the community, A.J. Dyck, in peace. Deputies of the village Soviet often talked with him. They exposed his greediness in front of the population; his striving to live off the hard-earned money of the people, who have been deceived by religion, showing the hypocrisy of their religious morals, their falsehood.

As a result of such work by teacher-atheists, active komsomol members, deputies of the village Soviet, the activities of the Mennonite Community were paralyzed substantially and the young people began to attend the cultural events at the library to withdraw from the sect. Thus, a former sectarian Marita Hoffman now studies at the technical college in Slavgorod. Tanya Heinrichs has also said good-bye to the sect forever. In February, 1963, L. Warkentin, a machinist from the power station, broke off with the sect. The atheists of this village continue with their noble cause, taking into account, that some time ago Nekrasovo was a large Mennonite settlement in the Slavgorod region.

The experience of the best propagandists convinces us that the first steps in individual work are most difficult and crucial for the atheist. On them depends the end-result of their work in many cases.

The above examples of the practical work of the atheist propagandists are unusual in that the atheists themselves live in the same village with the believers and know each other to a certain extent. Undoubtedly

for them it was easier to find ways to the soul of believers.

But if the propagandist doesn't know anything about the believer, on whom he has to work, he had better start to get to know him and his family as soon as he receives the first data from the directors of the collective where he works, from people that know him, from school teachers, etc. One must say that many Mennonites speak very carefully on religious subjects. One also meets up with the fact that ordinary sectarians receive strict orders from their ministers "not to speak to any godless people on matters of faith." ...Patience, tact and knowledge are necessary qualities in the work of an atheist.

(Excerpt from chapter five, "Educating Mennonites")

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING  
OF  
THE MENNONITE BRETHREN  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA  
July, 1986

The annual meeting was held on July 7, 1986 in Waterloo, Ontario. Approximately 20 People were in attendance.

1. The meeting was opened by chairman Helmut Huebert.
2. The major activity of the year was the publication of the society newsletter. A commemorative evening had been planned but circumstances led the executive to postpone that event.
3. For 1987 two events are being planned. In the spring of 1987 a meeting commemorating the ministry of Rev. and Mrs. H.H. Janzen is being planned for the Kitchener area. This event will be co-sponsored by the M.B. Historical Society of Canada and the Ontario M.B. Historical Society.

In the spring of 1987, this time in Winnipeg, a commemorative evening remembering the lives and

contributions of Rev. and Mrs. A.A. Kroeker is being planned.

4. This past year discussions were begun with the Historical Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada regarding their invitation to the M.B. Historical Society to join with them in the publication of the Mennonite Historian. In essence what they have asked for is a merger of our newsletter with theirs.

A committee has been struck from our Society, comprised of Dr. Helmut Huebert and Ken Reddig, and has met with a committee from the C.M.C. Historical Committee.

These discussions have indicated the following

- 4.1 Each Centre would have a page in each quarterly issue for news pertaining directly to each respective Centre.
- 4.2 The remainder of the paper would be news, articles and book reviews of more common "Mennonite" interest.
- 4.3 The format of the paper would be changed to reflect that the paper is no longer a publication only of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, but now also would include the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies.
- 4.4 By sharing our resources the cost to our Centre would be no more than the present cost of our xeroxed newsletter, plus, we would have a better-looking, typeset, paper.
- 4.5 Such a merger of the two papers needs the approval of members of the Society. Therefore, the executive of the Society brings to the membership the following recommendation:

4.5.1 That the Executive of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada be given permission to work towards a merger of the M.B. Historical Society Newsletter, with the

Mennonite Historian, provided a fair and equitable arrangement, on the part of both parties, can be agreed upon.

4.5.2 The above motion was moved, seconded and passed. There were some abstentions.

4.6 It would be hoped, should an equitable agreement by both the society and the C.M.C. Historical Committee be reached, that the first issue of 1987 might reflect this merger.

5. It was noted that the film project, The Mennonite Brethren Church: A Missionary Movement, is heading towards completion. Approximately \$25,000 still needs to be raised. The total budget is some \$60,000. With the monies in hand the first film of the three-part series is projected for release in January of 1987.

Recorded by  
Ken Reddig

SOME RECENT ACCESSIONS

1. Theses by Rev. G.D. Huebert: Mennonite Distictiveness and Christology in the Gospel of Luke.
2. Thesis by Ron Sawatsky: Looking for that Blessed Hope: The Roots of Fundamentalism in Canada, 1878-1914.
3. Anabaptist Mennonite Time Line (Chart), compiled by Robert Kreider.

4. Papers of the "Conference on Mennonite Self-Understanding" Conrad Grebel College.
5. "Finding Aid for the Contents of the materials donated by David G. Rempel," Conrad Grebel College.
6. Sermons (2 1/2 linear feet), including a detailed register, plus several hundred letters from listeners in the Soviet Union. Personal papers of the late David B. Wiens.
7. 210 sermons and outlines of the late Rev. Henry G. Thielman.
8. Personal papers of Katharina (Schroeder) Klassen.
9. Papers of the 1973 - 1974 building program at Eden Christian College.
10. The Neufelds of Waldheim 1744 - 1985, compiled by William Neufeld.
11. Bible Class Monitor, compiled by William Bestvater.
12. In Search of a Home: The Janzen Family Story, by Irene Friesen Petkau.
13. The Bergthal Colony, by William Schroeder.
14. Index to Mennonite Immigrants on U.S. Passenger Lists, compiled by David A. Haury.
15. The Dietrich Loewen Family: History and Genealogy 1820 - 1985, by Susan F. Suderman
16. The Bartel Reunion, by Annie Janzen.
17. Sermons, Abacus, photos and family register of the late Rev. Peter and Maria Kornelsen.
18. Thesis: Mennonite Brethren Missions: Historical Development, Philosophy an Policies, by Ben Doerksen.
19. Bartholomaeus Tiessen: 359 Jahre Familien-tradition, by Frank Tiessen

- 20. Come Let us Stand United: A History of the Corn Bible Academy 1902 - 1977, by Vernon R. Wiebe
- 21. "Stand Punkt: Evangelische Monatsschrift" (An East German Evangelical Publication), 1977 - 1986.
- 22. North Kildonan M.B. Congregational Records (to be Micro-filmed) 1967 - 1982.
- 23. Eight boxes (10 linear feet) of files of MEDA (1970 - 1981 inclusive).

this winter.

Once completed, the film will be made available to all Mennonite Brethren congregations. The purpose of the film is to recover the spirit of sacrifice and the zeal for missionary service, as illustrated by our forefathers.

Some \$20,000 still remains to be raised in order to complete this project. Donations may be sent to either the Centre for M.B. Studies in Fresno or Winnipeg.

### ARCHIVES RECEIVES GOVERNMENT GRANT

A recent federal program has committed funds for Canadian Archives to help them clean up backlog situations. Application was made this summer, and funds have been granted, for the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies to properly catalog its photographic collection. This collection, inherited from M.B.B.C., the M.B. Herald and other Conference organizations has been accessible in a relatively rough form since the archives were begun. The funds which have been granted will permit the hiring of extra staff to properly catalog this important collection.

### MENNONITE PIANO CONCERTO UPDATE

A recent call to Dueck Film Productions revealed that some 13,000 copies of the "Mennonite Piano Concerto" have been distributed. The success of this recording is phenomenal, at least by Canadian Standards.

Of further interest is the fact that in a recent survey on the C.B.C. program, "R.S.V.P.", the composer, Victor Davies, and the "Mennonite Piano Concerto" were chosen as the most popular composer and musical composition in Canada. As a result on Friday, September 12, 1986, "R.S.V.P." interviewed Mr. Davies and played the "Concerto" in its entirety.

### M.B. MISSIONS FILM NEARS COMPLETION

The film "The Mennonite Brethren Church: A Missionary Movement," is nearing completion. This three-part series, which features Dr. J.B. Toews as historian, should be ready for use by congregations in the summer of 1987.

As a follow-up on this success story, Victor Davies has written a reduction of the "Concerto" for two pianos. It is hoped that by Christmas this reduction (87 pages) will be available for the general public.

The film is now being sponsored by the Historical Commission of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Film-maker Burton Buller, of Henderson, Nebraska, is committing his production company to completing the film

Copies will be sold by the Centre for M.B. Studies. If you would like to be notified when the "Concerto" is available, perhaps as a Christmas gift to someone in your family, please write the Centre indicating your interest. Cost of music will not exceed \$20.00/copy.

ARNOLD DYCK: VOLUME TWO

The second volume of the Arnold Dyck series, this time including his Low German sketches, will be released before Christmas, 1986. Edited by Dr. Al Reimer, the volume should be of interest to Low German readers, since it contains approximately one-half of Dyck's Low German stories. Copies will be distributed through the Centre or the Mennonite Book Club.

HIERSCHAU HISTORY FORTHCOMING

For the past few years Dr. Helmut Huebert of Winnipeg, Chairman of the M.B. Historical Society of Canada, has been researching and writing a history of his mother's village in Russia, Hierschau. It is expected that the book will be available for sale in mid-November.

The book is no small project. Approximately 400 pages in length it is amply illustrated with maps, charts and photographs. Unusual in a book of this nature is its broad sweep of the Russian historical context as well as the general Mennonite context. Thus the history will serve as a broad description of Mennonite life in Russia, in addition to a more detailed study of the village of Hierschau.

MEDA RECORDS DEPOSITED

The Centre for M.B. Studies has been chosen as the archival depository of the "Mennonite Economic Development Associates." Arriving at the Centre in September were the early records of the organization, dating from 1970 - 1981. Already completed, through the diligent efforts and cooperation of the MEDA secretarial staff, is a detailed "Finding Aid" to these records. In total some ten linear feet of administrative files were deposited.

The Newsletter of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada is published four times a year by the Executive of the Society, at the Centre for M.B. Studies in Canada. All correspondence regarding the Society or the Newsletter should be addressed to:

NEWSLETTER EDITOR  
M.B. Historical Society of Canada  
1-169 Riverton Avenue  
WINNIPEG, Manitoba  
R2L 2E5

If you know of someone who would be interested in becoming a member of the Society and receiving the Newsletter please have them fill out the following form, and send it, together with the yearly membership fee of \$5.00 to the NEWSLETTER EDITOR, at the above address. Editor of the Newsletter is Ken Reddig.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

# "Dynamics of Faith and Culture in Mennonite Brethren History"

## Program

### SESSION I

Friday, November 14, 1986 (7:00 p.m.)

1. "A Religious or Social Elite: The Mennonite Brethren in Imperial Russia"

**DR. JAMES URRY**

Dr. Urry teaches in the Department of Anthropology, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

2. "Continuity and Change Among Mennonite Brethren" (8:30 p.m.)

**DR. PETER HAMM**

Dr. Hamm serves as the Secretary for Asia, Africa and Europe with the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions and Services, Winnipeg.

### SESSION II

Saturday, November 15, 1986 (9:00 a.m.)

1. "German Language and Faith and Culture"

**DR. JACOB LOEWEN**

Dr. Loewen is a translation consultant for the American and United Bible Societies, Abbotsford, B.C.

2. "Ethics and Culture" (10:30 a.m.)

**DR. DELBERT WIENS**

Dr. Wiens teaches philosophy at Fresno-Pacific College, Fresno, California.

### SESSION III

Saturday, November 15, 1986 (1:00 p.m.)

1. "New Mennonite Brethren and Faith and Culture"

**KATIE FUNK WIEBE**

Mrs. Wiebe teaches in the Department of English, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas.

2. "Disintegration of Faith and Culture" (2:30 p.m.)

**DR. PAUL TOEWS**

Dr. Toews teaches in the Department of History, Fresno-Pacific College and serves as Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.

### BANQUET

Saturday, November 15, 1986

6:00 p.m.

"A Matter for Diplomacy: The British Government and the Mennonite Migration of the 1870's"

BANQUET ADDRESS BY DR. JAMES URRY

## REGISTRATION FORM

"Dynamics of Faith and Culture in Mennonite Brethren History"

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

**LODGING:** If you require lodging please make your requests know below. Unfortunately, no College housing will be available.

Hotel/Motel: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Home: \_\_\_\_\_

**TRAVEL:** If you will require transportation to the MBBC or to your place of lodging, please note the following:

Carrier: \_\_\_\_\_

Terminal: \_\_\_\_\_

Arrival time: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### REGISTRATION FEES:

_____ Symposium — including Banquet	\$20.00
_____ Banquet only	\$10.00
_____ Lectures only	\$10.00
_____ Students: Banquet	\$10.00
_____ Lectures	\$ 5.00

Please make your cheque payable to: **Centre for MB Studies**  
169 Riverton Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2L 2E5

**NOTE:** Registration fee provides each person with a copy of the major papers, and helps defray some of the Symposium costs.