The Origin of the Bible School Movement in Western Canada: Towards an Ethnic Interpretation

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Since the start of the first Bible school in Canada in 1885, Protestant groups have initiated more than 140 such institutions throughout the country.[1] Like their American counterparts, these schools typically offered a Bible-centred, intensely practical, lay-oriented program of post-secondary theological training,[2] and have scattered thousands of church workers, pastors, missionaries and evangelists to every corner of Canada and the world. A conservative estimate indicates that at least 200,000 people have spent at least one academic term at a Canadian Bible school or college.[3] (This figure does not include the many who frequently attended week-end teaching conferences organized by these schools, or those who were influenced by reading the literature published by these schools, or those who regularly listened to radio broadcasts aired by these schools, or the those who were significantly influenced by alumnae from these schools.) The Bible school movement has been a significant factor in the remarkable growth experienced by evangelical Protestant groups in Canada during the twentieth century. Despite its size and influence on Canadian Christianity, the movement is still, as Ben Harder noted in 1980, to a great extent unknown since it has been "largely ignored or else played down as the relatively minor activity of some rather small, fundamentalist sectarian groups."[4] Although certain schools within the movement have attracted some scholarly attention in recent years,[5] a comprehensive analysis like the one attempted by Virginia L. Brereton on American Bible schools is still a significant lacuna within Canadian religious historiography.[6]

As a step towards a fuller understanding of the Bible school movement in Canada I will conduct a preliminary probe into the origin of the Bible School movement in Western Canada. Since a comprehensive study of the Bible school movement is well beyond the scope of this presentation I have set the following parameters. First, the study will be limited geographically to the four western provinces. Seventy-five percent of the Bible schools started in Canada were, and still are, located west of the Ontario-Manitoba border.

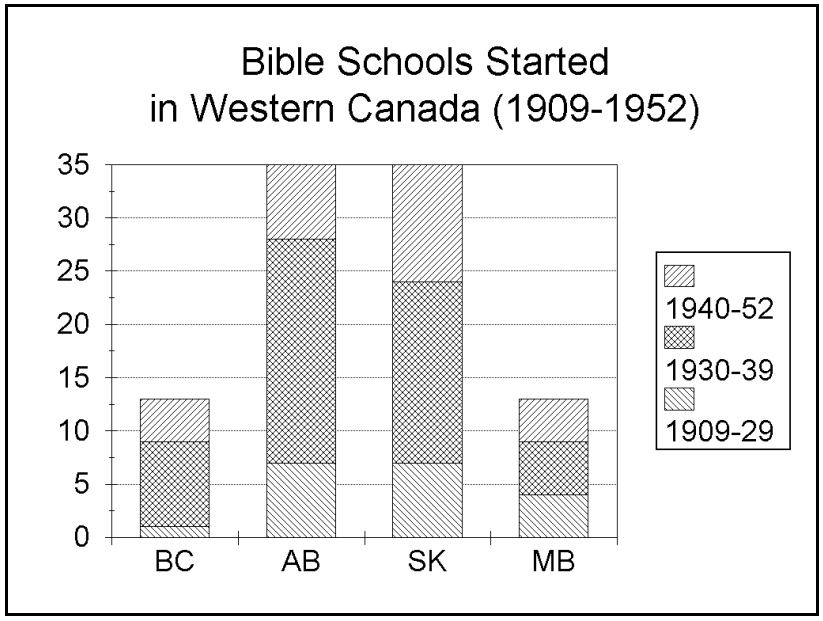

Figure 1

Second, it will be limited to the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1909 and 1952 about 90 different Bible schools were started in Canada's four western provinces. As Figure One indicates almost 20% of these Bible schools came into being during the first two decades of the twentieth century; more than 50% were started during the dreadful depression decade of the 1930s; and the remaining 26% made their debut between 1940-1952. The decade following 1952 marks a significant watershed in the development of the movement: post-secondary schools started

by evangelicals after this date – and there were none for almost a decade – are mostly liberal arts colleges, graduate schools, and Bible schools for Native peoples. During the 1950s and 60s many of the older schools were closed or consolidated with others. These larger, more central institutions became increasingly preoccupied with accreditation and academic respectablity.

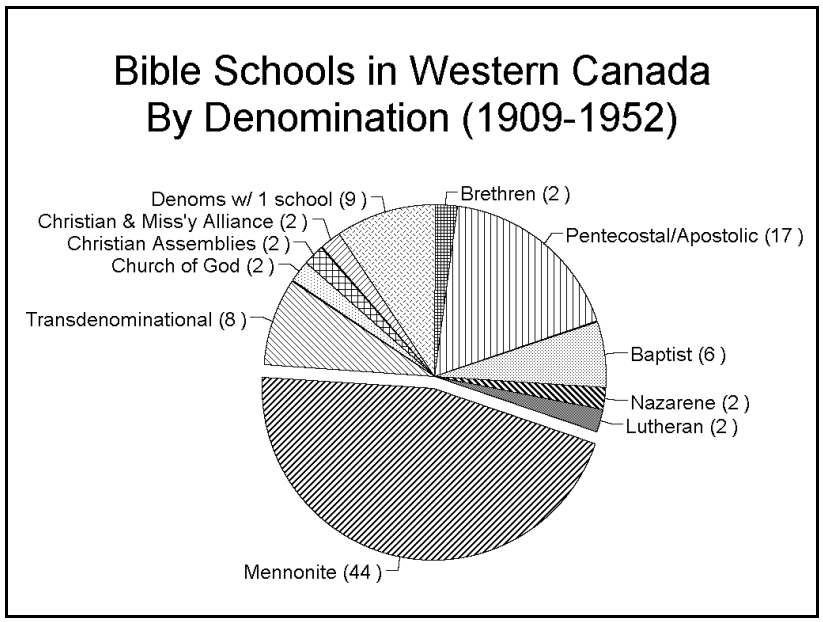

Figure 2

Third, the scope will be narrowed still further by highlighting the role played by ethnicity in the origin of the movement. (By ethnicity I mean the combination of factors such as common history, language, religion and culture which work together to create a sense of peoplehood.[7]) The proliferation of Bible schools that took place between 1909-1952 coincides with the settlement in western Canada by different ethnic immigrant groups. Although Figure Two is organized by denomination, the prominence of ethnicity as a factor within many of the religious communities involved in the movement (e.g., among the Mennonites, Lutherans, Baptists) provides some indication of the potential for the type of analysis

I am proposing. It is the active involvement by some of these ethnic communities that accounts for the disproportionate number of Bible schools in western Canada, and it is this cultural and religious pluralism that calls for a more multi-faceted interpretation of the Canadian Bible school movement than allowed for in previous studies – studies which have allowed religious factors to overshadow ethnic and social aspects,[8] and studies which usually characterized the entire movement in light of the non-denominational schools that have now become the larger, more prominant schools.

I will use as my case study those Bible schools started by three different groups of Mennonites. There are several reasons for selecting Mennonite schools rather than Bible schools started by some other ethnic group (e.g., German Baptists, Norwegian Lutherans, Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant Church, etc.). First, the Mennonites were among the first to introduce Bible schools to the Canadian prairies: Herbert Bible School was started in 1913 preceding Prairie Bible Institute (1922) in Alberta and Winnipeg Bible Institute (1925) in Manitoba by a decade, and Briercrest Bible Institute (1935) in Saskatchewan by more than two decades. Second, of the 90 Bible schools that existed in Western Canada prior to 1952 by far the largest proportion were started and operated by Mennonites (a few identified themselves as inter-denominational but were essentially Mennonite schools).

In constructing the historical context that gave birth to the Mennonite Bible schools I will highlight various challenges faced by this ethnic immigrant community in western Canada. Following a brief survey of Mennonite immigration to Canada, I will look at the dissolution of the village system which the Russian Mennonites tried to transplant in Canada. The disintegration of this system significantly changed the ordered and isolated world of the Mennonites by creating a great deal of social chaos. Almost simultaneous with the disintegration of the village system came a second threat to Mennonite cultural autonomy, the long struggle over, and eventual loss of, the right to operate private German elementary schools. This was followed by a third challenge, a growing disillusionment with the church, which had once been the heart and soul of the Mennonite community. The various Mennonite groups responded in different ways to these problems: of particular interest for this study are three Mennonite denominations which, because of their interest in the revitalization of the church, and because of their desire to compensate for the loss of private

German schools, borrowed several educational genres (i.e., Sunday schools and Bible schools) and adapted them for the Canadian prairies as part of an internal strategy for ethnic and religious self-preservation. I will conclude by showing how the usual characterization of the Bible school movement as a fundamentalist reaction against certain ecclesiastical and theological traditions is in need of revision, and by pointing towards some questions that might profitably be explored in greater depth.

Survey of Early Mennonite Migrations to Canada

First, a very brief introduction to Mennonite immigration to Canada. Mennonites comprised one part of the radical sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement. Over the centuries they have repeatedly sought refuge in countries that would offer them religious toleration. This search eventually led them to North America. Mennonites first arrived in Canada in 1786 when a group of Swiss-German Mennonites from the United States settled in the fertile lowlands between the Niagara escarpment and Lake Ontario. Although there were some 5,500 Mennonites scattered throughout Upper Canada by 1841, it was not until a massive migration beginning in 1874 of Dutch-German Mennonites from Russia (known as the Kanadiers) that the group became established as a sizeable component of Canada's ethnic melange. During the 1920s a second group of Mennonites arrived from Russia (dubbed the Russlaender), and it is these Russian Mennonites who play one of the most significant roles in the Bible school story in Western Canada.

The Russian migration during the 1870s was prompted largely by the desire to escape the impending threat of military conscription, and the increasing encroachment of Russian culture on Mennonite life. Fearful of a possible threat by Bismark, Tsar Alexander II called for a country-wide conscription in 1870. He also informed the Mennonites that henceforth Russian would replace German as the official language of instruction in all Mennonite schools. Both American and Canadian agents tried to entice the disenchanted Mennonites to settle their respective portions of North America:[9] despite a more severe climate and more difficult access to commercial centres, Canada was alluring because it specifically exempted Mennonites from military service (Militia Act of 1793). Following an exploratory tour funded by the Canadian government on the part of a Mennonite delegation, the group was sent a letter by John M. Lowe, secretary

to the Minister of Agriculture, outlining the terms of their agreement: the Canadian government agreed, among other things, to grant entire blocks of land for the exclusive use of the Mennonites; it promised the "fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles . . . without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever; and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools"; the government permitted the Mennonites to exercise their preference for "affirming" instead swearing an oath; and the Canadian government even offered to finance partially the immigrants' transportation costs.[10] Of the approximately 17,000 Mennonites who fled Russia at this time, Canada welcomed about 7,500, most of whom belonged to the more conservative groups.[11] These immigrants settled on two large land reserves in southern Manitoba, plus another settlement of two villages (Rosenort and Rosenhof) north and west of Morris, MB.

The Volost vs. Municipalization

The Russian Mennonites, unlike their Swiss-German Mennonite predecessors,[12] attempted to transplant intact their closed habitat/open-field village system (volost) complete with its own administrative infrastructure, taxation system, disciplinary regulations, and educational and welfare institutions.[13] Almost all of the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s chose to settle within such a village system. Ruled by church elders the two reserves were virtually a collection of autonomous ministates.

This village structure, however, was soon challenged by forces from both without and within. The municipal system adopted by Manitoba in 1879 demanded that land be titled in the name of an individual. This differed radically from the system used by the Mennonites in Russia where land was jointly owned and administered by the church thereby furnishing the church with the ideal means for controlling dissent and for preserving cultural homogeneity.[14] Tension increased within Mennonite communities as municipal authority slowly began to overlap with the responsibilities carried out by the church elders. When a minority of the Manitoba Mennonites began to participate in the municipal electoral process, others – the majority – vigorously resisted. It was, however, simply a matter of time before the municipal system prevailed for it had effectively removed the mechanism by which the church could insure conformity, i.e., it allowed excommunicated dissenters the legal right to retain their land and hence

their livelihood.[15]

While the private ownership of land was the factor that made possible the disintegration of the village system, it was hastened considerably by individualistic impulses that prioritized personal economic gain above the survival of the communal system. To help the community become as self-sufficient as possible (and thereby preserve its isolation), the village system insisted on the development of a mixed economy. This meant dictating to individual farmers what they could or could not produce. As cash-starved pioneering farmers realized that their leaders could no longer enforce their commands concerning how the village land should be used, the temptation to ignore communal dictates and utilize their land for cash crops proved too great a temptation for many. The prospect of personal economic prosperity increased the demand for autonomy from the communal system. Moreover, for enterprising Mennonites, the introduction of railroads brought a variety of new occupational alternatives to the "sacred" occupation of farming. Various towns along the rail line soon became prosperous trading centres, but even more importantly, they served as the hubs of assimilation with, and adjustment to, Canadian society. The village system eventually disintegrated as immigrants moved away from the villages and established homesteads on their own property: by 1910 only a few villages remained intact.

Private German vs. Public English Schools

Simultaneous with the struggle over municipalization and the consequent disintegration of the village system came a second threat to Mennonite cultural autonomy, the long struggle over, and eventual loss of, the right to operate private German elementary schools. As various Mennonite historians have pointed out, this conflict was more than simply a matter of jealous opposition between the English and German language: it was nothing less than the first round in a cultural war between "the British military imperium and a pacifist sect which believed itself to be espousing the kingdom of God and its righteousness."[16] This was part of a larger conflict in Canada between Anglo assimilation and integrationists who wanted to forge Canada's population into one nation with one uniform language and culture, and non-Anglo ethnic groups who preferred to retain some of their cultural and religious distinctives.

In keeping with their tradition, the Russian Mennonites had estab-

lished elementary schools in each village in Manitoba immediately upon their arrival. These schools, patterned after the church school system developed by Johann Cornies in South Russia, provided basic instruction in the three Rs as well as in Bible and Catechism for children up to the age of fourteen. They were deemed an integral part of a Mennonite community by even the most conservative groups.[17] They were not only essential for insuring a certain standard of literacy within the community but were also seen as the primary mechanism for passing religious traditions and language on to the next generation. For the more conservative groups, which were the majority in Manitoba at this time, this was to be done with the most minimal educational advance or intellectual openness.[18] The schools were financed by taxes levied against all property owners in the village and were operated under the direction and strict control of the church. However, for a variety of reasons, these schools became notorious for their inadequate – and deteriorating – level of instruction.[19]

The inferior educational standards brought the matter of Mennonite private schools to the attention of the government.[20] From the late 1870s onward the government made repeated attempts to improve the schools by offering financial assistance to those that hired teachers agreeing to upgrade their credentials. Most Mennonite villages rejected such offers fearing that any financial advantages would be offset by eventual battles over jurisdiction. In the late 1880s a movement for reform in the school system gradually took shape among the progressive minority who believed that a more adequate education and instruction in the English language was essential for the success of their children. Those involved were invariably members of the Bergthaler church and were often merchants from either Gretna, Winkler or Altona, the "urban" centres of commerce for the Mennonites. With the backing of the government they organized a few public schools in the Mennonite reserves.[21]

Controversy intensified with the passage of the Manitoba School Act in 1890. While not aimed directly at the Mennonites, the Act did make it clear that the government intended to replace private denominational schools with a system of state-controlled, tax-supported schools in which English would be the official language of instruction. Although the Mennonites appealled to the terms of their 1873 agreement, they quickly discovered that the promise made by the federal government guaranteeing them autonomy in matters of education was illegal since education was the jurisdiction of provincial governments.[22] In spite of their differences,

neither the progressive Mennonites, and certainly not the conservatives, wanted their children educated in schools run entirely by the state. For both groups, the responsibility to educate their children was seen as a sacred trust from God,[23] and as the means for perpetuating their language, culture and religious beliefs. Despite their differences, they all agreed that "their identity as a people depended in large part on how successfully they would transmit their religious and cultural heritage to their children."[24]

Fortunately for the Mennonites, the furor that shook the entire country with the passage of the Manitoba School Act prompted a number of concessions to religious and bilingual instruction.[25] But the conservatives resolutely refused to accept public schools and took full advantage of the fact that the bill had stopped just short of making attendance compulsory either at public or at recognized private schools. The progressives now joined forces with the government. Together they hired Heinrich H. Ewert of Kansas to reopen Gretna Normal School (later renamed Mennonite Collegiate Institute)[26] and to serve as the government inspector of schools among the Mennonites.[27] It was Ewert's conviction that "the best way to preserve Mennonite values was to accept public schools for Mennonite areas but to place well-qualified teachers in them. They could supplement the government requirements with the curriculum and language of the church."[28] By running teachers' conventions and a series of five-week sessions that included instruction in both English and German, in methods of religious instruction, and in subjects like Bible, church history, apologetics and ethics as well as the program of studies outlined by the government, Ewert prepared prospective teachers capable of teaching in bilingual schools (he also recruited qualified teachers from Russia and the United States). Moreover, as Ewert slowly gained the confidence of Mennonites in the various districts, he was able to persuade them to accept bilingual public schools:[29] by 1895 there were 24 such schools in operation (an increase of 16 in five years), and by 1902 the number had increased to 45 (one-third of all the Mennonite schools).

By the time Saskatchewan and Alberta officially became provinces the idea of a public school system was generally accepted by the Mennonites (the notable exceptions were the two large Old Colony reserves in Hague-Osler and Swift Current). In 1905 a group of progressive Mennonites in Saskatchewan established a teacher training institute, the German-English Academy, at Rosthern. Like the Gretna school, it too was led by an American, David Toews and served as a rallying point for the

progressives in the area. Neither school was controlled by one specific denomination; rather each was governed by a society of subscribers from which a board was elected. These two schools marked the first two post-elementary schools established by Mennonites in Canada. Although both schools were initially designed as teacher training institutes they both eventually became high schools; neither however, attained the college level to which each aspired (influence of the American model).[30] As teacher training schools, they accepted and promoted the public elementary schools but tried to keep them as Mennonite as possible. As high schools they served as substitutes for the public system.

The final round in the battle over schools was precipitated by the imminent advent of the first World War. Pro-war propaganda and rising nationalistic sentiments turned public opinion against the German-speaking Mennonites. The suspicion of Mennonites as "enemy aliens" was aggravated by a general resentment over their exemption from military service, and their obstinate refusal to assimilate. The growing nationalistic spirit generated pressure on governments to use the public school system for assimilating ethnic minorities and instilling a general sense of patriotism.[31] In 1907 Premier of Manitoba Rodmund P. Roblin decreed that the Union Jack, the symbol of the British Empire, be flown over every public school building. It was his intention "to inculcate feelings of patriotism and materially assist in blending together the various nationalities in the Province into one common citizenship irrespective of race and creed . . . what we need is to get the youth filled with the traditions of the British flag and when they are men . . . they will be able to defend it."[32] Needless to say, the Mennonites found this extremely offensive; many of the public schools operated by the Mennonites reverted back to private status.

The pressure increased in 1916 when Manitoba, despite complaints from many sources,[33] passed the Attendance Act in 1916 which made English the sole language of instruction and compelled all children to attend public schools or approved private schools (Saskatchewan followed suit a year later with a similar bill). The Mennonite private schools were condemned as inadequate and the buildings requisitioned to serve as public schools. Parents who failed to send their children to a recognized school were fined or in some cases, even jailed. This attempt to coerce particularly the conservative Mennonites into compliance prompted a massive exodus of approximately 8,000 Mennonites to Latin American countries.

The progressives lobbied aggressively to save their public bilingual schools.[34] In a petition to the Provincial Legislatures they emphasized that they were unable

> "to delegate to others the all important responsibility of educating their children, convinced as they are, that instruction in other religious schools would result in the weakening and even loss of faith, and would be generally detrimental to the moral and spiritual welfare of the children." But they declared their readiness to provide for adequate instruction in English; to strive toward "the highest standard of education which is possible to attain under our Mennonite teachers with their present qualifications"; to intensify the training of Mennonite teachers; to facilitate inspection by the Department of Education; in short, to "place our schools beyond just criticism."[35]

Despite such assurances, their efforts to save their parochial schools were unsuccessful. As Francis observes, it

> was no more a question of educational standards which prompted the authorities to destroy the Mennonite private grade schools once and for all, and to replace them with English public schools. It was part of a consistent national policy aimed at the assimilation of ethnics to safeguard national unity and cultural uniformity. In this policy the school figured prominently as the most effective means to wean the children of immigrants away from the traditions of their group and to indoctrinate them with the ideals and values of the dominant majority.[36]

As the response to the demise of the Mennonite private elementary school system indicates, the concern for the religious instruction of their children is a deeply rooted part of Mennonite history and tradition – the responsibility to educate their children was seen as a sacred trust from God. Moreover, all believed that "their identity as a people depended in large part on how successfully they would transmit their religious and cultural heritage to their children."[37] This was a general concern among all Mennonite groups, motivating both the conservative groups in their dogged resistance to any degree of acculturation and their eventual emigration to Latin America, and the more progressive groups in formulating their compromises with the government. When such compromises as the

bilingual elementary schools were no longer permitted, their concern for the education of their children left little choice but to develop alternative strategies for providing religious education and teaching German to their children. For this they looked to a number of educational models, namely Sunday schools and Bible Schools.

Church Decline and Renewal

The external and the internal threats to the Russian model of community life that I have described created a great deal of chaos for Mennonite social institutions. This was particularly true for the churches, which had long been the very heart and soul of the community.[38] Overcoming the disallusionment that many felt towards the churches, and stimulating a spiritual revitalization, especially among the younger generation who had not known life in Russia and who were most tempted by assimilation, was the third challenge facing Canadian Mennonites at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The popularity of the Western-Canadian Mennonite churches reached an all-time low in the 1890s after a long period of stagnation, conflict and decline. Many immigrants became disillusioned by the inability of their religious leaders to foresee and forestall the threats to their cultural autonomy. The church was discredited further by leaders who exploited their power to protect or further their own interests. Still others left the church disappointed by its continual resistance to "progress" and the pejorative designation of "worldly" to all things new or different.

Differing opinions concerning appropriate responses to what appeared to be the deterioration of Mennonite values and the pernicious influence of Canadian culture resulted in a series of church schisms; this not only eliminated the possibility of a united front on such issues like public schools, but also fragmented the immigrant community into rival factions.[39] The more conservative groups (e.g., Old Order, Kleine Gemeinde, Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Chortizer) continued to resist change by advocating an ever greater degree of withdrawal and separation.[40] The more progressive groups (e.g., Bergthalers, Mennonite Brethren in Christ, Mennonite Brethren, Bruderthaler, Rosenorter) felt that Mennonitism could be saved only through new movements, through spiritual awakenings and aggressive institutional advances. For these Mennonites who were eager for renewal within the church, the preservation and the propogation

of Mennonitism depended on the adoption of evangelical Protestant models. For example, they vigorously advocated the use of Sunday schools; introduced innovations in worship like four-part singing and instrumental accompaniment; promoted rural, urban and foreign missions; developed a more organized approach to works of charity; cooperated with different voluntary societies; and began to make better organizational use of centralized conference offices.[41]

The three Mennonite groups most affected – some would say infected – by North American evangelicalism just prior to and immediately after the turn of the century were the the Mennonite Brethren, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, and the General Conference Mennonite Church. While still the distinct minority in Canada in the early part of the twentieth century (they became the majority by about 1950), these three groups quickly became the most popular and influential ecclesiastical option among Canadian Mennonites. Instead of withdrawing to Latin America or other, more remote, parts of Canada, they were busy organizing institutions and networks designed to accommodate various aspects of Canadian culture while retaining their ethnic distinctiveness. Members of these three denominations were often the urbanizers and entrepreneurs, establishing congregations and businesses (and missions) not only in rural districts but also in the growing prairie towns. This required a certain degree of competence in English, and certainly more education than basic literacy. As a result, these groups often produced leaders who served as spokespersons for Mennonites as a whole. It is also these three groups that are involved in initiating and operating Bible schools.[42] I will survey briefly the involvement of these three groups in the Bible school movement pointing out some of the differences in emphasis among the three groups, and then highlighting some of the concerns and characteristics they all had in common.

The smallest ecclesiastical option for progressive Mennonites in Canada during the early part of the twentieth century was the Mennonite Brethren Church (Brüdergemeinde).[43] The first Mennonite Brethren congregation in Canada came into existence in 1888 (Burwalde, Manitoba) as the result of church extension efforts by two ministers sponsored by the Mennonite Brethren in the United States.[44] The Burwalde congregation, which moved to Winkler in 1897, soon started a number of satellite congregations in neighboring communities. The membership of these churches comprised mostly former members of Sommerfelder and Old Colony

churches.[45] Shortly after the turn of the century, the Mennonite Brethren presence in western Canada received a substantial increase in members as Mennonite Brethren immigrants from the United States settled in seven different Saskatchewan towns. These American immigrants were familiar with evangelical Protestantism and were therefore particularly interested in introducing various innovations to the church in Canada.

Despite being one of the smallest Mennonite denominations at the time the Mennonite Brethren were the most aggressive in the Bible school movement. The school that has the distinction of being the first Mennonite Bible school in western Canada, and also the second Bible school in western Canada, is Herbert Bible School.[46] Started in 1913, it was the fruition of two years of work on the part of the Northern District Mennonite Brethren Conference. The conference succeeded in establishing a school at such an early date primarily because of the proximity of John F. Harms (1855-1945), a prominent Bible teacher among the Mennonites who had been involved in Bible school work in Kansas prior to settling on a farm at Flowing Well south of Herbert in 1908.[47] During the winter months Harms taught short one-month Bible courses which in 1913 were expanded to become a two year program in the newly formed Bible school. The stated purpose of the school was twofold: "to establish and strengthen youth in the fundamental principles and doctrines of the Scriptures" and "to provide sound Biblical training for definite Christian service in such work as Sunday School instruction, Daily Vacation Bible School, Young People's and choir work, as well as extended Mission work at home and abroad."[48] The language of instruction was German. In 1918 Harms moved back to the United States, and the school closed due to financial difficulties.[49]

After a two-year closure, the school was reopened in 1921 by William J. Bestvater, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, a former Winnipeg city missionary and a popular Bible conference speaker. According to Toews, it was Bestvater who gave the school its particular image, an image, one might add, that was used repeatedly as a model by other Mennonite Brethren groups starting their own schools.[50] By writing various textbooks (e.g., *Die Glaubenslehre* and *Die Bibelkunde*), and by editing a modest periodical entitled *Das Zeugnis der Schrift*, Bestvater disseminated the dispensationalist eschatology he had learned at Moody and through "the Scofield Bible Courses [and] Bible Conferences [with] men like A.C. Gaebelein, William Evans, A.C. Dixon, William B. Riley,

Harris Gregg and others."[51] Epp indicates that the dependence on such theological influences was "a harbinger of things to come in the Mennonite Bible School movement in the prairies, especially among the Brethren."[52] Although the Mennonite Brethren were and remained the driving force behind the school, the local executive actively sought the support of local General Conference Mennonites and even the Sommerfelder. An informal association with the General Conference Mennonites continued until the 40s when they began to support their own Swift Current Bible Institute.[53]

In 1925 a second Bible school was established by the Mennonite Brethren, this one being quite different than the first. Abraham H. Unruh, a teacher at Tschongraw Mennonite Brethren Bible School in Russia emigrated to Canada in 1924. Largely through his influence Pniel [meaning "the face of God"] Bible School came into being the following year in Winkler, Manitoba (the name was later changed to Winkler Bible Institute). Although the school began with a modest six students, the number increased to seventy within three years. Unruh therefore recruited several former associates from Tschongraw to assist as teachers. As was the case in Herbert, the General Conference Mennonites were also actively involved in this school during the first few years.[54]

Although both Herbert and Winkler were run by the Mennonite Brethren there were definite differences in perspective and emphasis. The curriculum at Winkler was "patterned largely after that in Tschongraw which in turn was patterned after the curriculum of the German Baptist Seminary in Hamburg."[55] As a result it emphasised the training of ministers.[56] The school at Herbert was modelled after certain American Bible institutes and stressed missions and the preparation of lay workers. The addition of American-trained A.A. Kroeker to the staff at Pniel helped incorporate into the program an emphasis on the intensive training of Sunday School teachers. Herbert and Winkler represent the two major strands of influence converging in the Bible schools started by the Mennonite Brethren.

Beginning in the late twenties and continuing throughout the thirties the Mennonite Brethren started at least sixteen additional schools in western Canada. Most of these schools have long ago either closed or been incorporated as a part of another school. While impossible to sketch the history of each institution I will highlight several of the schools that have survived as well as some of the significant trends that developed during this period.

In 1927 the Mennonite Brethren started a second school in Saskatchewan; this school, located in Hepburn, was designed to serve the northern constituency in the province. It was modelled after the Herbert school. According to Toews it has, more than any other Mennonite Brethren school, inspired its students and graduates for mission work at home and abroad.[57] Although at least five other schools were established in Saskatchewan during this period – some in relatively close proximity to Hepburn, all, including Herbert, were incorporated as a part of Bethany by 1957.[58]

In Alberta, the Mennonite Brethren established five schools within eight years. All of them were, for various reasons, closed by 1966. Most influential was Coaldale Bible School (initially called Morning Star Bible School); more than a 1000 students attended during its thirty-seven year existence. Like Bethany in Saskatchewan, Coaldale was in 1961 designated the provincial school. Other schools included Bethesda at Gem, a school that served a relatively small constituency; La Glace in the Peace River area that was founded by G. Harder, a graduate of Aberhart's Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute. Attempts to establish institutions in Vauxhall, Crowfoot and Grassy Lake were short-lived.

As the Mennonite Brethren continued to move further west, Bible schools began to appear in British Columbia. The first was Elim Bible School at Yarrow, one of the fastest growing Mennonite communities in the thirties and forties. Started in 1931, its enrollment during the forties peaked eleven years later at over 150. It was, however, forced to close in 1955. Like some of the Mennonite Brethren communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan, various communities in BC (Chilliwack, Greendale, Black Creek) also made attempts to establish Bible schools. With the exception of the school at Chilliwack, few lasted more than several years. The final school that deserves mention is Bethel Bible School originally located in Abbotsford. This school was started in 1936 by one congregation, but joined forces with several other local Mennonite Brethren congregations in the mid-forties to become the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute. In 1955 it relocated to Clearbrook and soon after was designated the provincial Bible school. In 1970 it was involved in a unique merger with a General Conference school, Bethel Bible Institute. Since Bethel desperately need to escape both from "inadequate facilities and the unpleasantness of polluted air," and MBBI was looking for a way to broaden its support base, the two schools joined together to form Columbia Bible Institute (now known as Columbia Bible College).[59]

Manitoba never saw the same proliferation of Mennonite Brethren schools as did the other three western provinces. This was largely due to the relatively small number of Mennonite Brethren and because of Winkler's established reputation. Nevertheless, the Mennonite Brethren did for a short period during the thirties conduct an evening Bible school in Winnipeg and were the catalyst behind the founding of Steinbach Bible School (now known as Steinbach Bible College) in the early thirties. The Steinbach school soon became a community Bible school and is still operated by a consortium of four Mennonite denominations.[60]

The second Mennonite denomination to become involved in establishing a Bible school in western Canada was the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. A formidible force among the Mennonites in Ontario they were a much smaller part of the Mennonite presence in western Canada. Strongly influenced by Methodist revivalism in Ontario, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ stressed the necessity of a climactic, emotional personal conversion and personal piety, and demanded strong institutional loyalty as an expression of the Christian life.[61] This difference is, at least in part, also explained by the fact that the Mennonite Brethren in Christ were predominately made up of Swiss Mennonites.[62] The group concentrated its energy on winning converts and, as a result, reached well beyond its ethnic borders. It had, for example, established a mission in Edmonton by 1906, which three years later became Beulah Home for unmarried mothers. The group's mission emphasis and readiness to de-emphasize its Mennonite ethnic and theological distinctives not only gave the group a greater freedom in neighborhood evangelism but also made them one of the groups most open to assimilation into Canadian culture.[63] As part of an effort to improve its missionary efforts, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ was one of the first groups to use English for church services and was the first to suggest that its Mennonite name might be obstructing its evangelistic objectives.[64] In 1921 the group began the Mountain View Training School in Didsbury, Alberta.[65] The school had a strong emphasis on missions and evangelism, and was among the first Mennonite schools to use English as the language of instruction. Reflecting its general openness towards assimilation was its conscious maintenance of an interdenominational faculty. In September 1992 the school merged with Hillcrest Christian College to form Rocky Mountain College in Calgary. Over the years the Mennonite Brethren in Christ became a unique conglomeration of influences, so much so in fact that it is no longer identifiably Mennonite.[66]

The third Mennonite denomination involved in the Bible school movement was the General Conference of Mennonites. In contrast to the Mennonite Brethren in Christ who deliberately reached beyond the Mennonite boundaries, the General Conference Mennonites worked at consolidating Mennonite congregations who were "in danger of drifting away because of geographic isolation, cultural differences, congregational practices, or doctrinal variance."[67] Through the work of Reiseprediger (itinerant American preachers), who were sent north as "home missionaries" throughout the 1880s and 90s,[68] the General Conference Mennonites attempted to extend its conference network to western Canada.[69] While initially unsuccessful in their attempt to establish formal ties with the more progressive groups like the Bergthaler in Manitoba and the Rosenorter in Saskatchewan, the Reiseprediger did exercise considerable influence on them through services, Bible studies and home visitations.[70] To encompass the natural diversity within such a large – and loosely affiliated – general conference of churches, the General Conference Mennonites were more accepting of urbanization, of public schools, and had developed a more "liberally oriented" stance towards personal behaviour.[71]

The absence of a clear denominational structure in Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century helps explain why the General Conference Mennonites were somewhat later in starting their own Bible schools. Many General Conference Mennonite congregations simply collaborated with local Mennonite Brethren schools and saw little reason to start their own. The first General Conference Mennonite Bible school, Elim Bible School, began in 1929 as an appendage of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute. After ten years it was moved to Altona. Motivating the General Conference Mennonites was the fact that the Mennonite Brethren had already established three Bible schools by 1929 and that many General Conference Mennonite young people were attending them.[72] Three years later Johann H. started the Mennonitischen Religionsschule in Winnipeg; a similar school was also established at Rosthern. Despite their slow start the General Conference Mennonites, like the MBS, witnessed an incredible proliferation of Bible schools during the 1930s. More than a dozen schools were begun by General Conference Mennonite groups between 1929-1939. One of the few General Conference Mennonite schools to survive until the present is Swift Current Bible Institute. It began in 1936; in 1961 it absorbed the Rosthern school. In 1939, five General Conference Mennonite schools were founded in British Columbia.

The only one to survive any length of time was Bethel Bible Institute which was first located at Aldergrove and then relocated to Coghlan. As mentioned previously it merged with a Mennonite Brethren school in 1970 to become Columbia Bible College.

Both the Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference Mennonites across Canada received an enormous boost from the fresh wave of Russian Mennonites entering Canada during the mid to late 1920s. Many were able to settle in areas already occupied by Mennonites because of the simultanous exodus of 8,000 conservative Mennonites. This arrival of another 20,000 immigrants substantially altered the face of Mennonitism in Canada. Better educated than their Kanadier counterparts, and much more willing to assimilate, they gave the educational endeavours on the part of the more progressive Mennonites substantial support.[73] In fact, the Russlaenders arrived with such strength and leadership that their "many gifted and devoted ministers, leaders, teachers, and men qualified in practical affairs" soon assumed dominant roles in many congregations and institutions.[74] A case in point already mentioned is the Mennonite Brethren Bible school located in Winkler, Manitoba.

Having surveyed the Mennonite denominations involved in the Bible school movement highlighting some differences in emphasis and approach, I will now examine some of the characteristics and objectives they had in common. Initially most of the Bible schools admitted students immediately after the completion of elementary school;[75] in this they filled an educational void before the development of provincial high-school systems.[76] Starting in the late 1930s and early 1940s some of the Bible schools developed provincially-approved high school programs (e.g., Steinbach Bible College). To accommodate rural students the academic term was kept short – on average only four months, beginning in late October after harvest and finishing in February or March before seeding. This also allowed many instructors to support themselves thereby reducing the financial demands on students and on the constituency. The majority of the early Bible schools were started in homes or in church buildings, and served very specific congregations or districts. Always present was the dual curricular emphasis: Deutsch and Religion. In some schools, German was the sole language of instruction until the late 1930s after which English gradually came to be used as the dominant language of instruction.[77]

As suggested previously, it is no accident that the birth of the Men-

nonite Bible school movement coincides with the time when public elementary schools became an unavoidable reality. In fact, the Bible schools can be seen as an extension of their concern for the religious education of their children and for the preservation of certain cultural attributes (i.e., language). Church leaders apprehensively warned: "Die Schulen unseres Landes sind religionslos. Unsere Kinder bekommen in den Distrikt und Hochschulen gute Unterweisung in vielen nützlichen Fächern, aber die direkte religiös Unterweisung wird vermieden."[78] Although a few schools did begin with the stated objective of training ministers for the church (e.g. Winkler), this focus was soon subsumed by the primary passion that animated the other schools, i.e., keeping the young people and grounding them in the Mennonite faith, language and way of life. The early literature of the Mennonite Bible schools is preoccupied – almost obsessed – with desperate attempts to impress the young people of the utmost importance of attending Bible school. Jacob Theilmann, Principal of Alberta M.B. Bible School in Coaldale, emphatically implored: "Bible School training is a *MUST* for *ALL* Christian young people."[79] Cornelius Braun, Principal of Herbert Bible School wrote: "Whereas our public and high schools fail to offer any Christian training, a period of Bible instruction is indispensible. *No young person who has such an opportunity can afford to miss out on this training*" (emphasis mine).[80] In addition to welcoming missionary speakers to speak at chapel services, Mennonite Bible schools also frequently invited travelling evangelists to conduct services: more than a few schools note how such meetings resulted in the conversion of students.[81] This was undoubtedly what many leaders hoped would happen to their young people while at Bible school – it also confirms that, at least for a time, the task of training church workers was not the first priority.

This is not to suggest that the churches did not recruit workers from their Bible schools; it is only to say that this was, at the outset, a desirable by-product for the denominations involved. Students trained in Bible schools did bring vitality and energy back into the life of the local church life.[82] For example, in 1963 the Mennonite Brethren estimated that 90% of their missionaries abroad, 86% of their missionaries at home, 59% of their ministers, and 67% of their Sunday School workers had some Bible School training.[83]

By moving momentarily beyond the parameters outlined at the beginning one can observe several subsequent developments among the Mennonite Bible schools. Beginning in the forties and continuing on for more

than a decade is a trend towards consolidation and amalgamation. This was precipitated by technological advances in communication and transportation – and the growing post-war prosperity among the Mennonites that enabled them to afford automobiles, and the growing economic burden created by what were, in many cases, redundant institutions only a few miles apart. The process of consolidation and amalgamation created larger institutions making it possible "to improve the quality of education, to expand services, and to operate more economically." While economic realities played their part, the move was also precipitated by a desire to create educational institutions of higher learning that could attract those students who might otherwise go to universities.[84]

The move towards accreditation resulted in the creation of several degree-granting colleges. As early as the forties various denominational leaders realized that the pastors of the future (particularly in urban churches) would require a more general education to keep pace with lay people in their congregations. Moreover, denominational leaders felt a certain degree of frustration when they saw their best students attend American colleges and then not return to Canada. In 1944, A.H. Unruh left Winkler to head up the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg; only a few years later the General Conference Mennonites established the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, also located in Winnipeg. The creation of these, university-affiliated colleges created an identity crisis among the remaining Bible schools. Most were not located near a university campus, and neither did they have the financial and faculty resources to move towards college status: it became increasingly difficult for Bible schools to attract young people for a three or four year period.[85] The trend towards accreditation has moved a step further in the last twenty years with the establishment of two colleges that function within a university system: Conrad Grebel College began in 1963 and is a part of Waterloo University; in 1988 Menno Simons College became an undergraduate college affliated with the University of Winnipeg.[86]

In conclusion I will highlight briefly several implications of this study that identify certain dimensions of the movement that require additional study. First, I have demonstrated that the Mennonite Bible schools did not originate as a reaction against existing ecclesiastical or theological traditions – although in one sense the Anabaptist tradition has always represented a rejection of other ecclesiastical and social traditions; rather they represented a major effort on the part of various Mennonite denomi-

nations to protect their homogenity as Mennonites by passing on their religious and ethnic distinctives to successive generations. One can, therefore, suggest that a more multi-faceted explanation of the development of the Bible school movement in Canada is necessary. Although I have looked only at the reasons for the emergence of the many Mennonite Bible schools in western Canada, any re-assessment of one part of the Bible school movement inevitably requires a new view of the whole movement. This means that the commonly held assumption that the Bible school movement in Canada was simply a fundamentalist response to theological liberalism needs to be revised.[87] While such a thesis – aside from its careless use of the word fundamentalist – is probably valid in explaining the origins of many Bible schools in the United States and for certain schools in Canada, it does not provide an adequate explanation for the existence of the numerous Mennonite schools in addition to doing considerable injustice to some other schools as well.[88]

Second, while it has not been the focus of this paper, a study of the Mennonite Bible schools raises questions about the complex relationship between faith and ethnicity. In addition to using various evangelical institutional models as part of a strategy for cultural and religious self-preservation,[89] many within the Mennonite denominations also endorsed certain evangelical emphases, particularly the central place given to missions and evangelism. Although these emphases varied among the different Mennonite denominations, it did eventually mean confronting the possibility of integrating non-Mennonites into the church and community, and addressing an inclination towards ethnocentrism. As a result, a certain ambivalence towards North-American evangelicalism has always existed among Canadian Mennonites. Some considered these evangelical emphases as essential for the spiritual health and vitality of the church and therefore encouraged the creation of a multi-ethnic community of believers appealing to a spiritual unity that transcended ethnic differences; others were more reticent fearing that trying to separate and subsume ethnic distinctives was tantamount to an open endorsement of cultural assimilation (or homogenization). Without going into detail about how the various denominations have struggled with these questions (suffice it to say that it is still far from being a dead issue),[90] the struggle was exacerbated by the large numbers of Mennonite young people who, despite having a plethora of Mennonite schools from which to choose, opted instead to attend one of the non-denominational evangelical institutions. Student enrolment

figures at both Prairie Bible Institute and Briercrest Bible Institute indicate that, from the late 1930s onwards, Mennonite students consistently made up 25%-35% of the student population.[91] On the basis of the evangelical influence in the Mennonite Bible schools, along with the impact of the non-denominational schools on Mennonite students, a case could be made arguing that evangelicalism served as a potent force accelerating the "Canadianization" of ethnic immigrant groups like the Mennonites.[92] Evangelicalism was far more effective as an agent for assimilation than the deliberate, and often coercive, efforts on the part of the Anglo-Saxon establishment to homogenize new immigrants. Finally, as I said at the outset, this is a preliminary probe: much more needs to be done before a full assessment of the Bible school movement can be made.[93] Such an assessment has the potential of being a significant window from which to view the way evangelicalism has shaped the cultural and social configuration of Western Canada.

Endnotes

1. The first Bible school in Canada was the Mission Training School in Niagara Falls; the second was the Christian Institute in Toronto (founded by William Gooderham in 1888 but under the direction of Alfred Sandham, a Methodist: it became insolvent in early 1893); the third was another short-lived attempt called the Toronto Missionary Training School founded by John Salmon (with the encouragement of Alfred Sandham) in October 1893 as an outreach of Bethany Church (C&MA). All three schools had close links to the Christian and Missionary Alliance. In 1894 Elmore Harris of Walmer Road Baptist Church initiated an inter-denominational venture known as the Toronto Bible Training School which had the backing of a much broader constituency than the first three schools – the school still survives and is now known as Ontario Bible College.

2. A Bible school or institute is an educational institution operating at roughly a high school level. They are different from Bible colleges, which are "degree-conferring" and whose curricula include "more liberal arts or general education courses" (S.A. Witmer, *The Bible College Story: Education with Dimension* [Manhasset, NY: Channel Press, 1962], 37; see also Virginia L. Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* [Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990], vii).

3. A guide to evangelical higher education published by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada in 1985 listed 76 Bible institutes and colleges with a combined enrollment (FTE) of 8,300. The total number of graduates from these schools was calculated to be 60,000: this did not, however, include alumni who had never graduated nor did it include those who attended schools no longer in existence in 1985 or not listed in the Guide (see "101 Reasons to Prepare for Life and Ministry in Canada: Annual College Guide," *Faith Alive* [November 1985]: 31-54).

4. "The Bible Institute-College Movement in Canada," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 22 (April 1980): 29. Harder's article was the first article specifically devoted to the Canadian Bible school movement to appear in an academic journal. While he refers to the superficial treatment given to the movement by H.H. Walsh, J.W. Grant and D.C. Masters, he fails to mention W.E. Mann, who in 1955 included a look at some Bible schools in his sociological study of sects and cults in Alberta (*Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press]), or Leonard F. O'Neil's work ("A Survey of the Bible Schools of Canada" (B.D. Thesis, McMaster University, 1949). Harder's analysis is limited by that fact that he includes only those schools still in existence in 1980, and by the way his interpretation is based primarily on the non-denominational schools which eventually became the more prominent schools.

5. See for example, John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "Proclaiming the Word: Canadian Evangelicalism Since the First World War" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1987). This formed the basis for his recently published work entitled *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

6. Keith Clifford makes a similar lament in "The History of Protestant Theological Education in Canada," *Study Sessions* 56 (1989): 94. Leaders within the Bible school movement must share a certain responsibility for this lacuna. Typical of the twentieth-century evangelical reticence to spend a great deal of energy analyzing history is Henry Hildebrand, founder of Briercrest Bible College, who asserts that evangelicals should be "more interested in making history than recording it! Driving with one's eye on the rear-view mirror is not safe" (*In His Loving Service* [Caronport, SK: Briercrest Bible College, 1985], 9). Such disregard for the necessity of an

historical perspective has also been accepted by his protege H.H. Budd who explains that true evangelicals are "much busier in making history than in writing it" (cited in G.A. Rawlyk, *Champions of the Truth* [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990], 5).

7. For some excellent discussions of the relationships between ethnicity and religion see Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review* 83 (December 1978): 1155-1185; John H. Redekop, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987); and Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Mennonite Ethnicity: Medium, Message and Mission," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 9 (1991): 113-121.

8. The same complaint is made by Cornelius J. Jaenen in his analysis of the Manitoba School Question ("The Manitoba School Question: An Ethnic Interpretation," in *Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education*, ed. Martin L. Kovacs, 217-231 [Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1978]).

9. Neither government was motivated by charity: the rapid expansion of the American railroad system prompted fear in Canada that the United States might make an effort to annex its western most territories. Settlers for the Canadian west became, therefore, an urgent priority. The government was particularly keen to find Protestant settlers to counterbalance the large Catholic Metis and French population in Manitoba. And finally, both governments knew that many of these immigrants were not destitute: for example, the value of the Mennonite's immediate contribution to Manitoba's wealth was estimated in excess of $1M (Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith: The Background in Europe and the Development in Canada of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba* [Altona: D.W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., 1970], 61, 73).

10. Cited in Gerbrandt, 57-59. The terms were presented – albeit in a slightly altered form – and approved by an Order-in-Council on 13 August 1873.

11. I am following Frank Epp's use of the categories "conservative" and "progressive" (*Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People*, Vol. 1 [Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974], and *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival*, Vol. 2 [Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982]). The conservative groups came from the Chortiza, Bergthal and Fuerstenland colonies, and from the Kleine

Gemeinde of the Molotshna colony. Many had been poor and landless in Prussia and among the least educated in Russia. These factors need to be considered in understanding their response to the threats of assimilation in their new homeland.

12. The Swiss-Germans had emigrated as families, or at most, extended families. Moreover, the areas in which they settled had reserved fourteen out of every forty-eight lots for the Crown and the Anglican Church as specified by the Constitutional Act of 1791.

13. For an excellent description and discussion of the Russian volost village system see John B. Toews, "Russian Mennonites in Canada: Some Background Aspects," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 2, No. 2 (December 1970): 117-146.

14. The Mennonite resistance to involvement in affairs of the "state," are ironic when one considers what a thorough marriage of church and state their settlements had become. It is not simply a coincidence that many of the church elders, whose position was equivalent to that of a mayor, were often among the wealthiest (see John B. Toews, "Cultural and Intellectual Aspects of the Mennonite Experience in Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 53, No. 2 [April 1979]: 140-141).

15. E.K. Francis writes, "the incorporation of the rural municipalities interfered directly with the traditional institutions of self-government and eventually led to their collapse. More decisive than the imposition of Canadian institutions of local government, however, was the kind of legal and political freedom permitted to the individual, fostering dissension within the group itself and resistance to social controls" (*In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* [Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955], 108-109). Underlying the dispute about the legal division of land was a confrontation between two world views: the Mennonite communitarian social values was thrust into competition with the more individualistic ideology of democracy. Gerbrandt notes that both the Canadian government and the Mennonites used the word "freedom," but the word meant radically different things to each group (72-73).

16. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, I:334.

17. See William Friesen, "A Mennonite Community in the East Reserve: Its Origin and Growth," in *Historical Essays on the Prairie Provinces*, ed. Donald Swainson (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1970), for a lengthy excerpt from Kleine Gemeinde regulations concerning education (116-117).

18. The suspicion of education has a long heritage among the Mennonites (see Francis, 167-68, and Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:338).

19. The village school system suffered from a lack of trained teachers, partly because villages, and therefore schools, were more numerous in Manitoba than in Russia, and partly because the more liberal-minded teachers did not emigrate. Moreover as opportunities for economic prosperity increased it became more difficult to attract and keep competent teachers. But despite the problems, the Mennonites were among the few ethnic groups that required every member of the community to acquire at least a minimal level of literacy (Francis, 164).

20. E.H. Oliver describes a visit to these schools: "All have the same type of backless seats, the same dazzling light pouring into pupils' eyes from left, right and front, the same absence of maps, pictures and charts. Some have a blackboard three feet by four feet. One even has two, but some have none. All the pupils pass through four grades: 1. A.B.C., 2. Catechism, 3. New Testament, 4. Old Testament. In the forenoon they sing and say their prayers, then study Bible history and practice reading . . . for three hours in the afternoon they work at arithmetic and writing. It is simple fare, but it is all the teacher himself has ever received. Frequently he does not even know Hoch Deutch well enough for conversation. So through seven years they go, from October 15 to seeding and again for one month in summer, ignorant of the facts of Canadian history . . . and taught that the English language will only make it easier to lapse into the great world of sin outside the Mennonite community" (cited in C.B. Sissons, *Church and State in Canadian Education: An Historical Study* [Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1959], 203). See also a report made by W. Thiem-White which precipitated government action (cited in Jaenen, 320).

21. This was bitterly resented by the conservatives. Because many of the conservatives refused to vote, the progressives were able to enact the School Act and have a public school instituted at public expense in some districts. This forced all people in the district to pay a municipal school tax

on top of the private levy they might already have been paying in support of a private school.

22. Many had seen a copy of John M. Lowe's letter: the terms were, however, altered in the statement approved by Order-in-Council--presumably by legal clerks who wished to match the language of existing laws. The paragraph pertaining to education in the Order-in-Council reads: ". . . that the Mennonites will have the fullest privileges of exercising their religious principles, and educating their children in schools, *as provided by law* [emphasis mine], without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever." The highlighted change does give the agreement quite a different meaning (cited in Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:339).

23. One Old Colony Bishop explained, "the question of conducting school is for us a religious issue. Hence we cannot submit the schools to government control" (cited in Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Society* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989], 190).

24. See Rudy A. Regehr, "A Century of Private Schools." In *Call to Faithfulness: Essays in Canadian Mennonite Studies*, ed. Henry Poettcker and Rudy A. Regehr (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 1972), 106.

25. Any school district with more than 10 students with a mother tongue other than English could officially offer instruction in a language other than English. Religion could be taught by lengthening the teaching day. Jaenen cites *The Manitoba Free Press* to point out that these concessions were made by the Province of Manitoba to appease the French-Catholic lobby "in the expectation that it would be taken advantage of only by the French and by them in a limited degree and by a few and diminishing number of Mennonite communities." In reality, it had exactly the opposite effect: ethnic groups soon realized that it allowed for the possibility of ethnic group perpetuation, and as a result, exacerbated the very tensions the government had tried to circumvent (323-329).

26. The school was initially founded in 1889 (was called the Mennonitische Lehranstalt) but closed after one year due to opposition from a contingent of Bergthalers in the area and incompetent leadership.

27. The affiliation with the government and the presence of an educated American deepened the rift between the progressives and conservatives. The conservatives had legitimate reason to suspect the American influence for the American Mennonites were among the first to assume "the inevitability, and perhaps even the desirability, of a language transition." They had, therefore, established a network of colleges that were "intended to fortify Mennonite religious values so that any cultural accommodation to American society would not threaten the essential core" (Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:335).

28. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:342. The strategy underlying such cooperation was similar to the one used in Russia during this time. The intention was to learn a new culture while strengthening the old one, however it seems that the Mennonites feared Russification a great deal more than Anglicization.

29. Sissons gives a remarkably positive review of these schools (204).

30. Due to some internal conflict at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute another school was established for a time in Altona (1908-1926).

31. A case in point is an editorial appearing in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on May 18, 1920 which insisted that "the modern democratic state cannot agree that the parents have the sole right of determining what kind of education their children shall receive . . . the children are the children of the state of which they are destined to be citizens; and it is the duty of the state that they are properly educated" (cited in Francis, 179).

32. Cited in Francis, 174.

33. In 1913 the Mennonites had organized a Schulkomission consisting of representatives from the Bergthaler, Sommerfelder and Brethren churches. It presented briefs asking for the continued right to have their own private schools and to teach German and religion in the public district schools (Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:355).

34. The refusal to allow the continued existence of bilingual schools was not precipitated only by the Mennonite schools. The influx of numerous eastern European ethnic groups had caused serious conflicts in some ethnically mixed school districts. Francis observes that "the abolition of the bilin-

gual public school had been justified on account of its inefficiency and the frictions it caused. The immediate effect was a much greater inadequacy of the school in Mennonite school districts and increasing frictions between the minority and majority; this in turn, was used as a convenient rationalization to demand complete suppression of all Mennonite private schools. Behind this demand, of course, lay ulterior motives, primarily national sentiment and resentment in and after World War I, and the determination of the Anglo-Saxon majority to forge Canada's population, outside Quebec, into one nation with one uniform language and culture" (Francis, 184).

35. Cited in Francis, 186.

36. Francis, 186; see also Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 2:105-109.

37. See Regehr, 106.

38. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:233ff. The church provided not only a spiritual centre but also a sense of identity, social status, community and fellowship for Mennonites.

39. It is somewhat ironic that such schisms sometimes meant that Mennonite groups could get along better with their Ukrainian, Russian or Greek neighbors than with members of a rival Mennonite group.

40. The conservative church leaders frequently made rather "lavish and indiscriminate use of excommunication not only for serious offenses . . . but also for minor infractions of old customs" (Francis, 89). Many deviants cast their lot with the Provincial authorities to free themselves of the tyranical control of their authoritartian brethren.

41. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:235-236.

42. If one moves beyond western Canada one must include the Old Mennonites who in 1907 started Ontario Mennonite Bible Institute.

43. The Mennonite Brethren came into being as part as part of a religious reform movement in Russia during the 1860s. They were strongly influenced by European pietism and the British & Foreign Bible Society.

44. John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno, CA: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 153. The official inauguration of a congregation in Canada was preceded by four years of visits by two Mennonite Brethren ministers from Minnesota. The Mennonite Brethren were never as effective as the General Conference Mennonites in attracting disenchanted members of the more conservative groups, largely I suspect because of their insistence on rebaptism by immersion.

45. See Toews, *Pilgrims and Pioneers*, 156.

46. The first Bible school in western Canada was likely the Holiness Bible College which was first located in Crystal City, MB (1909-11). After several relocations it eventually merged with a Free Methodist (Aldersgate College) school in Moose Jaw, SK (see Zella Nixon Brown, *Aldersgate: The College of the Warm Heart* [n.p., n.d., ca. 1976], 43).

47. Harms was educated and had five years teaching experience in Russia before emigrating to Mountain Lake, Minnesota in 1878. Several years later he attended the Evangelical College in Naperville, Illinois. He moved to Canada in 1906 where he lived in Edmonton until settling on a farm at Flowing Well. Here he became the first minister in the Gnadenau M.B. Church (see Anna Redekop, "A Brief History of the Herbert Bible School," n.d.). A different story is told by Margaret Epp who states that he came to Canada in 1905 as the founding principal of the German-English Academy at Rosthern (*Proclaim Jubilee*, n.p., n.d. [1977], 3).

48. *Herbert Bible School Prospectus* (1955-1956), 5.

49. Harms did not actually teach at Herbert during the winter of 1915-1916. Herman Fast, a co-worker with Harms, filled in for one year.

50. Toews, *Pilgrims and Pioneers*, 259.

51. Anna Redekop, "Amazing Grace: The Life Story of William J. Bestvater," Rev. Wilhelm J. Bestvater Papers, Box 1, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Archives, Winnipeg, MB.

52. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 2:85.

53. Epp, *Proclaim Jubilee*, 2.

54. Bergthaler bishop Jakop Hoeppner donated the land for the school at Winkler; his successor, David Schulz took classes at Pniel but felt that official support should only continue if some of their own teachers were included on staff. In 1929 the Bergthalers, together with the Blumenorters, established their own school in Gretna (Elim Bible School) which subsequently moved to Altona (Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 2:256).

55. Russian Mennonites interested in theological education in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century generally opted for one of two schools: the Freie Evangelische Predigerschule in Basel, or the Predigerseminar der deutschen Baptisten zu Hamburg-Horn. Harry Loewen notes that Mennonite Brethren students preferred the Baptist seminary in Hamburg, which was "more devotional in nature" than the school in Basel ("Intellectual Developments Among the Mennonites of Russia: 1880-1917," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 8 [1990]: 94). See also Fränzi Edelmann, "Zur Gründung der Evangelischen Predigerschule in Basel," in *Basileia – Festschrift für Eduard Buess* (Basel: 1993): 91-102.

56. This was one of the few Bible schools that was originally designed to train ministers. Unlike many other Mennonite denominations at the time, the Mennonite Brethren usually chose ministers who had received some prior theological training.

57. Toews, *Pilgrims and Pioneers*, 261. The Western Children's Mission was launched as an outreach program of the school in the late thirties.

58. Tabor Bible School was located in Dalmeny, less than twenty miles from Hepburn. Although Tabor declared itself to be an interdenominational school it was in reality operated almost exclusively by the Mennonite Brethren.

59. Regehr, 113.

60. The consortium is comprised of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference, and the Chortizer Mennonite Conference.

61. This stood in stark contrast to the spirituality exhibited by conservatives Mennonites who strongly resisted revivalism and the breakdown of community that inevitably seemed to accompany it. For them joy and satisfaction "lay in conforming to the will of God as interpreted by the bishop, in raising large families, keeping a good household, and otherwise exemplifying a well-ordered life in social conformity and agricultural productivity." Salvation was more corporate than individual, hence the great emphasis on conformity and on group separation from the world (Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:285).

62. See Henry Paetkau, "Russian Mennonite Immigrants of the 1920s: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984): 72-83, for a discussion of the way two different historical-geographical political-cultural crucibles helped to form two different "sub-ethnic" communities.

63. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:240. Hints of Epp's discomfort with evangelicalism abound: a rather glaring example occurs in his discussion of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, a denomination that he believes has been affected by the inflated "denominational ego and spiritual arrogance" which are a "characteristic by-product" of the evangelical awakening. He nevertheless defends the implicated Mennonites by arguing that for "timid Mennonite people such expressions of self-confidence helped to wash away an apologetic gospel and inferiority feelings, which generations of persecution, isolation and nonconformity had written deep into their souls. To join the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, therefore, or to imitate them, meant the discovery of an identity which was socially more respectable and personally much more satisfying than the old separatist style" (1:237). It is however more probable to suggest that the emphasis on personal conversion nurtured this type of confidence and not some inflated denominational ego. Moreover, "timid" is not the first adjective that immediately comes to mind when I think of Mennonites and their often bitter inter-nicene schisms!

64. Efforts to get the denomination to drop the word Mennonite did not succeed until 1947 (Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:327). This debate tends to erupt in those Mennonite groups most infiltrated by evangelicalism: it is currently raging among the Mennonite Brethren.

65. The Didsbury Mennonites were quick to become involved in local business and civic affairs (the first two representatives of this area to the provincial legislature were Mennonites). Some had even enlisted in the army during the First World War.

66. Epp notes that "from the Wesleyans, they accepted revivalism, a second work of grace, doctrines of holiness and the notion of complete sanctification, and new forms of church government; from the Pentecostals, the emphasis on the Holy Spirit, though never sufficiently to satisfy those who were really Pentecostal at heart; from the Calvinists, elements of predestination; and from the Darbyites, premillennialism" (*Mennonites in Canada*, 2:505).

67. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 1:238. Their rapid growth in the United States was also due to their success in attracting the immigrant groups arriving in the United States. General Conference Mennonites church leaders were concerned about the implications of Mennonites scattering into scores of little isolated communities across the prairies. The conference idea was forwarded as the means for retaining a sense of community (1:318). The conference (or denomination) strategy stood in opposition to the more conservative groups who opted for having one bishop oversee one or, at most, several congregations.

68. Epp notes how the conservative groups were "especially aggravated by their [the Reisepredigers'] insistence that they had light and truth to bring to the north" (*Mennonites in Canada*, 1:289).

69. Small groups of General Conference Mennonites congregations were, however, established at various places in Saskatchewan in the early 1900s.

70. Both the Bergthaler and the Rosenorter functioned as synthesizers, a community to which the disgruntled progressives from other Mennonite denominations could migrate. In 1903 they finally joined to form the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, a conference that was destined to become the largest Mennonite denomination in the country.

71. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ and General Conference Mennonites differed also in polity: the Mennonite Brethren in Christ developed a more centralized superintendency to oversee its missionary endeavors; the General Conference Mennonites was much more democratic. It would not

undertake anything that had not been approved by delegates of the largely independent congregations.

72. Regehr, 106; Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 2:255-256. Pressure was also felt by Mennonite groups as more and more of their young people began to attend non-Mennonite schools. Particularly popular were Prairie Bible Institute and William Aberhart's Prophetic Bible Institute. In Saskatchewan, schools like Millar Memorial Bible Institute and Briercrest Bible Institute also attracted Mennonite students (Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 2:470).

73. In 1914 the Mennonites in Russia were operating 450 elementary schools, 19 high or central schools for boys, four girls schools, two teachers colleges, two four-year trade schools and one eight year business college (both trade and business schools required three languages), one school for the deaf and dumb, one deaconess institution and one Bible school (three others were started between 1923-1926). About 250 students were attending Russians institutions of higher learning and about 50 were studying in seminaries and universities outside of Russia (Frank Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* [Altona: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1962], 21, and Loewen, 90-93). This openness was the deciding factor that permitted their entry into Canada. There was a short period of time during the 1920s when the Mennonites were forbidden to enter Canada as immigrants, but this restriction was rescinded by MacKenzie King.

74. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 2:255; see also 2:417 for a discussion of how such a "takeover" was resented by various Kanadier groups, and even by some leaders within the more progressive denominations.

75. Admitting such young students created serious discipline problems for some teachers, prompting more than a few teachers to despair (Epp, *Proclaim Jubilee*, 2).

76. Bible schools were an attractive option in part, as Mann points out, because they offered "rural youth a means of improving their social status . . . Bible colleges gave individuals with little schooling who were attracted to ministerial or missionary careers a chance to rise socially" (86).

77. See *SCBI '61-'62: 25th Anniversary*, 14. From the outset, English was taught as a second language in most schools with the Bible being used as the textbook. In a few schools (Bethany
77. Bible Institute in 1927 is a good case in point) English was the language of instruction from the beginning (see *Konferenz-Jugendblatt* [November-December 1955]: 13)

78. J.H. Enns, "Mennonitische Biblschulen in Canada," *Warte-Jahrbuch* 1 (1943): 32. Enns' article also includes a discussion on the importance of Mennonite young people retaining their "Muttersprache."

79. Jacob B. Epp, Principal of Bethany Bible Institute, declares, "never before has there been a greater need for our young people to receive a thorough traniing [sic] in God's Work both for their own spiritual enrichment and in preparation for true Christian service." Epp and Theilmann are cited in A.J. Klassen, ed., *The Bible School Story, 1913-1963: Fifty Years of Mennonite Brethren Bible Schools in Canada* (Clearbrook, BC: Canadian Board of Education, 1963), 17-18.

80. *Herbert Bible School Prospectus* (1953-54), 2.

81. For example, see *SCBI '61-'62: 25th Anniversary*, 18.

82. Sunday schools were another opportunity to keep German-language instruction alive. They were first used by the Swiss Mennonites in Ontario, and became a significant tool in the fight to ward off anglicization. Epp describes the addition of the Sunday School as an event of "revolutionary significance," for it "involved the non-ordained people in the work of the church." Furthermore, "it helped to hold the young people's interest, increased Bible knowledge, elevated spiritual life, raised moral concerns, especially temperance, created lay-leadership, promoted the missionary movement, and generally enriched church activity and expression" (*Mennonites in Canada*, 1:244; 2:450-454). For the Mennonites there was a symbiotic relationship between the Sunday school movement the Bible school movement. Both were parts of an overall strategy to keep Mennonite culture alive and young people within the church. The growing demand for trained Sunday schools teachers (and later Daily Vacation Bible School workers) provided students for the Bible schools; the Bible schools in turn stimulated energy and enthusiasm in the form of trained workers.

83. Klassen, 16.

84. Toews, *Pilgrims and Pioneers*, 264. Many Bible schools obviously had some way to go before they could be considered competitors to local universities. Describing Bethany Bible Institute in 1955, one early historian writes, "formerly it was an exception to have a high school graduate in the ranks of the students. Today about half of the students have completed high school . . ." ("MB Bible Schools in Canada," *Konferenz-Jugendblatt* [Nov-Dec 1955]: 14)

85. In response to this dilemma, schools like Bethany Bible Institute and Swift Current Bible Institute recently reverted back to a two-year instead of a three-year curriculum.

86. For a time there was talk of establishing a Mennonite university in Canada. Instead, an endowed Chair of Mennonite Studies was established at the University of Winnipeg.

87. In Canada, William E. Mann, Ben Harder and Ronald Sawatsky have forwarded such a view. Mann attempts to apply S.D. Clark's church-sect theory to Alberta: he maintains that Bible schools came into being "primarily to produce pastors for the fundamentalist movement" (82). Harder argues that the Canadian Bible institute/college movement originated in opposition to the established church colleges, which had been contaminated by theological liberalism. Moreover, "these schools were part of a movement which sought to re-orient society away from secularism, humanism and materialism, philosophies which had ended in frustration and failure" (36). Sawatsky – who relies heavily on Harder – similarly argues that "the Bible schools were founded in reaction to the apparent drift from evangelicalism to rationalism to secularism that characterized main-line Canadian and American Protestant higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century" ("The Bible School/College Movement in Canada: Fundamental Christian Training," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1986): 3). Both imported this explanation from S.A. Witmer, an expert on American Bible schools, who in 1962 suggested that Bible institutes were essentially a reaction to main-line church colleges: "they represent a pietistic reaction to secularism, a theistic reaction to humanism and agnosticism, a resurgence of spiritual dynamic in Protestantism, a restoration of Biblical authority and direction in education, and a return to the central concern of Christian

education – the implementation of Christ's Great Commission: 'Go ye into all the world'" (30).

88. Stackhouse also suggests a modification of Harder's assessment in light of the broad range of denominations involved in the history of Toronto Bible College (*Canadian Evangelicalism*, 235, n. 81). Moreover, a good number of denominational Bible schools also do not fit the prevailing fundamentalist thesis for they were started to counter the attraction of the larger non-denominational evangelical schools (e.g., Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute).

89. This substantiates Leo Driedger's argument that urbanization did not necessarily lead to assimilation. Rather, the crucial factor in maintaining ethnic identity was the strength of institutional support among Mennonites (*Mennonite Identity in Conflict* [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988]).

90. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ were most openly evangelistic and as a consequence were also the first to remove "Mennonite" from their name. The Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonites were also evangelistic but usually targeted only other Mennonite groups – although missionaries would be sent overseas cross-cultural evangelism was not a serious priority in Canada. This has changed, and has ignited a significant debate – particularly among the MBS – concerning the relationship between North American evangelicalism and Mennonites (see e.g., Richard Kyle, "The Mennonite Brethren and American Evangelicalism: An Ambivalent Relationship," *Direction* 20, No. 1 [Spring 1991]: 26-37). In 1977, F.C. Peters, then Mennonite Brethren Moderator, declared, "I'm asking whether the use of a name which has an ethnic connotation [i.e., Mennonite Brethren] should not be reconsidered. [On the other hand can we] retain our spiritual heritage [if we drop the name?] . . . it is the biggest issue we have faced in 50 years" (*Mennonite Brethren Herald* [July 22, 1977). More recently this debate has focused on the pandora's box of issues opened up by John H. Redekop's *A People Apart*. Redekop claims that "Mennonite scholars have given scant attention to the complex issues involved in the relationship of faith to ethnicity."

91. See the way Enns complains about the number of "unserer Jünglinge and Jungfrauen in Bibelschulen anderer Denominationen" ("Mennonitische Bibleschulen in Kanada," 36). In 1978 Harold Jantz conducted a survey of Mennonite Brethren Bible school/college students in which he

discovered that 37% of the 800 students had chosen to study in non-Mennonite schools ("The Schools Students Choose [Part I]," *Direction* 8, No. 3 [July 1979]: 33-40, and "The Schools Students Choose: Why Young People Choose Mennonite Brethren Schools [Part II]," *Direction* 9, No. 3 [July 1980]: 20-23).

92. Robert Burkinshaw makes a similar observation in his study of conservative Protestant groups in British Columbia ("Strangers and Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in in British Columbia, 1917-1981" [Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1988]).

93. In addition to the reasons already forwarded by George Rawlyk, Ian Rennie and Michael Gauvreau explaining why fundamentalism never gained the same momentum in Canada that it did south of the border, one might add that the preoccupation with ethnic self-preservation kept Canadian Mennonites (and probably some other groups in Western Canada as well) from becoming involved. It is interesting to note that this is less true of Mennonites in the United States, who did not have the same strong sense of ethnic identity as their Canadian counterparts (see Paul Toews, "Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges: A Response to Cultural Transitions?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57 [July 1983]: 241-256; and Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Denominational Sectarianism: Mennonites in the United States and Canada in Comparative Perspective," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 3 [1978]: 239-241).