# MENNONITE LIFE

SEPTEMBER 1982

# In this Issue

This issue features a study of the sandstone tombstones which the Swiss-German Mennonites who immigrated from Pennsylvania to the Waterloo Region of Ontario decorated with ornate carvings. Nancy-Lou Patterson is Professor of Fine Arts and Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.

Peter Penner, Associate Professor of History at Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, shares his research on Henry S. Voth, a leader in the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Church during the first half of the twentieth century. Voth began his career as a *Reiseprediger* (itinerant minister) and was among the last of the Mennonite farmer-preachers among the Mennonite Brethren.

J. Denny Weaver, Associate Professor in the Department of Religion at Bluffton College, explores the implications of recent shifts in the interpretation of Anabaptist origins for contemporary beliefs.

*Mennonite Life* has occasionally included selections in Low German in an effort to acquaint readers with this aspect of Mennonites' linguistic heritage. Robert H. Buchheit, Assistant Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages at Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa, discusses his extensive study of "Plautdietsch," Mennonite Low German.

The annual bibliography continues to grow in length and indicates widespread research in Anabaptist-Mennonite studies. We appreciate the assistance of our colleagues in preparing this important aid for scholars.

Among the book reviews is John H. Yoder's extended essay on Theron Schlabach's *Gospel Versus Gospel,* a book which has aroused considerable interest since its publication in 1980.

Robert Kreider has returned from sabbatical and will resume the editorship with the December issue.

MENNONITE
LIFE

*September 1982 Vol. 37 No. 3*

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**Front Cover**

Cemetery, Germantown Mennonite Church, Germantown, Pennsylvania.

**Back Cover**

Cemetery, Germantown Mennonite Church, Germantown, Pennsylvania.

**Photo Credits**

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# Death and Ethnicity: Swiss-German Mennonite Gravestones of the "Pennsylvania Style" (1804-54) in the Waterloo Region, Ontario

**by Nancy-Lou Patterson**

The best known tombstone in Waterloo County has the earliest date: John Bricker (1795-1804). He was the second son, and the first of three Johns, born to John Bricker and Anna Erb, who settled near Blair, Ontario in 1802 and raised twelve children. In 1970, former members of the Blair Union Sunday School erected a memorial to John Bricker, incorporated his stone. (Fig. 1) He was the first person of European descent buried in Waterloo Region. John Bricker's stone is one of several hundred of its type, which are found in nine Waterloo County Cemeteries. Mixed among the many conventional white quartzite stones of Ontario Victorian Style, these sandstone slabs show themselves to be derived from an eighteenth century ethnic tradition brought from Pennsylvania along with the early Swiss-German Mennonite settlers, whose ancestors had come to North America by way of the Rhenish Palatinate.

Cemeteries containing these stones are, in the order of their earliest known or estimated dates: Blair Cemetery, Blair, Ontario (1804); Kinsie-Biehn Cemetery, Doon, Ontario (1806); Eby (First Mennonite) Cemetery, Kitchener, Ontario (1809); Limerick Cemetery, now located at Doon Pioneer Village, Kitchener, Ontario (1812); Wanner Cemetery, Hespeler, Ontario (1817); Freeport Cemetery, Kitchener, Ontario (1817); Hagey Cemetery, Cambridge (Preston), Ontario (1820); and Martin's Meeting House Cemetery, Waterloo, Ontario (1831). One stone is also found at Petersburg Cemetery, Petersburg, Ontario (*circa* 1840). These stones offer a rare opportunity to observe and document the gradual disappearance of a specific ethnic form, the "Pennsylvania Style" stones erected during the first fifty years of settlement by Swiss-German Mennonites in the Waterloo Region, Ontario.

A regularly striated sandstone from the Whirlpool Formation in the Georgetown area of Ontario was commonly used to build in nineteenth century Ontario: Hart House, Knox College, and Trinity College, all at the University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario, were built of stones quarried from this formation, which is situated at the base of the Niagara Escarpment and was laid down by an Ordivican

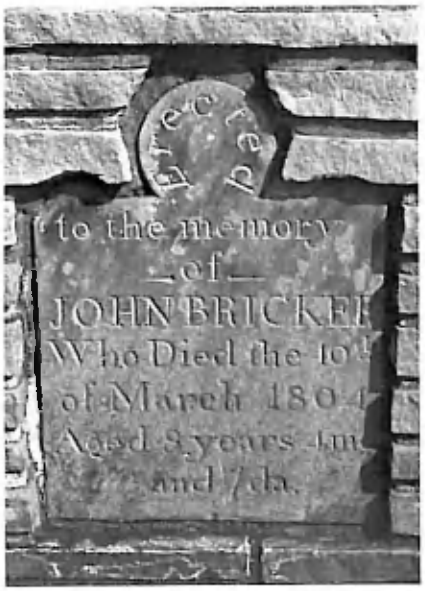


*Fig. 1: The earliest dated stone in Waterloo County: gravestone for John Bricker (d. 1804), Blair Cemetery.*


*Fig. 2: Contour with convex arch flanked by concave forms: gravestone for Samuel Clemens (d. 1836), Eby (First Mennonite) Cemetery, Kitchener.*

*Fig. 3: Contour with convex arch flanked by smaller arches: gravestone for Elizabeth Eby (d. 1844), Eby Cemetery.*

sea. Originally cream or rust-coloured, it is now weathered to dark grey. The laminated structure of the Whirlpool Formation, called "reed" by stone-cutters, is well-suited to the making of flat slabs for gravestones. Slabs from this source were sawn into shape (see the saw-marks on Figure 10) for use in Waterloo County, and given distinctive contours which are part of their style. At Eby (First Mennonite) Cemetery, which with some 110 slabs contains the largest deposit of these stones, at least twenty-four different contours were counted—twelve unique, and twelve repeated with varying frequency. The basic form of the stone is always a vertically rectangular slab, and in most cases this is surmounted by one or more hemispherical lobes or convex arches.

The two most popular contours are 1) a form composed of a central arch flanked by two concave curves which suggest scroll buttreses (Fig. 2), and 2) a trilobar form in which a central arch is flanked by two smaller arches (Fig. 3). These contours, and the decorative motifs which occasionally ornament them, most closely resemble the arcaded panels painted on the front of the *Kischt* or storage chest common in Pennsylvania, which is based upon South German prototypes. As an architectural feature, both single arches flanked by scroll buttresses, and tripled arches, form central features of facades in German Baroque and Rococo churches. The gravestone contoured in this manner suggests a door with an arch above it: a ceremonial portal which combines two related symbols. The door opens to receive the dead into the afterlife, and the arch suggests the overarching sky, to point their destiny heavenward. The meaning of this spatial form is reinforced by the images which are placed there.

*Fig. 4: Heart: gravestone for Maria Bauman (d. 1833), Eby Cemetery.*

The inscriptions on the stones are lettered in both Roman and Gothic forms. These include a Mixed Roman, containing upper and lower cases, *circa* 1804-1836 (Fig. 1); Gothic, *circa* 1816-1845 (Fig. 3); Roman capitals, *circa* 1823-1841 (Fig. 9); and Italic, *circa* 1840-1854 (Fig. 12). Apparently the Roman forms span the entire period, while the Gothic is earlier and the Italic, influenced by the encroaching popular style, is later. Both German and English inscriptions appear throughout the period: about half of the German inscriptions are in Roman and half in Gothic. Both Roman and Gothic forms are found in Pennsylvania.

Most of the inscriptions consist of a simple record of birth and death, with name and dates (including in many cases the years, months, and days of life). The longer epitaph became a regular feature of the white "Ontario Style" stones, but the inscriptions on sandstone are distinctly laconic. A few exceptions may be noted. One very early stone in Limerick Cemetery is surmounted by twin lobes of equal size, and bears (in part) this inscription:

HERE REST
in the
Firm hope of a joyful
Resurrection

---

| | |
|---|---|
| Elizabeth | Also |
| Clemens | Harriet |
| | Clemens |

These were two of the eighteen children of George Clemens (1777-1863) and Esther Stauffer (1790-1836), born between 1813 and 1835. The sisters who share this gravestone were born in 1806 and 1813, and died within a day of one another, along with their sister Mary (b. 1809). The marking of the graves of children with distinctive elements such as lambs is not found in the "Pennsylvania Style," but many of those with symbolic motifs were for children's graves, suggesting an extra care in memorializing them.

A second inscription of interest calls attention to the trek from Pennsylvania to Ontario, a unique feature of this stone. The memorial is for Elizabeth Schwartz, in Blair Cemetery. Translated from the somewhat phonetic German inscription, it declares: "She was born in Billtown (*?Bildaun*) in Bucks County, travelled to Waterloo (*Waderloo*) in the year 1822, died 20 March 1833 . . ." No other stone of this type reveals so much personal history, though the travel narrative is a feature of many local family records in handwritten and printed form.

Many of the surmounting arches of these stones contain the words *Hier Ruhet* or "Here rests," as if to suggest a rest not only in the earth but in Heaven. Eleven of the surviving stones, however, also display ornamental motifs in this position. Motifs so placed are the heart (1833), the tulip or lily (1836, 1837, 1837, and 1847[?]); the willow tree (1836, 1837, 1837, and 1840), the quatrefoil (1841), the *Sechstern* (1842), and the eye (1845). There are a few late sandstone slabs cut exactly like the quartzite forms which contain conventionalized willow trees clearly not part of Pennsylvania German traditional style, like one for William Tyson (1844). A number of slabs (1812-1850) also bear ornaments which could be called flourishes; these vary in form from simple strokes to leaf-bearing boughs, and are used to space or embellish the lettering (see Figs. 1, 2, and 12 for examples of simple flourishes). One or two slabs use one or more equal-armed crosses for these purposes.

Most of the featured motifs are incised with the precision and vigour which is part of their ethnic style, but the four willow trees (found in three cemeteries) are somewhat

feeble versions of the widely-used weeping willow of Ontario popular culture. Quartzite stones began to appear about 1846 and soon outnumbered the earlier sandstone slabs.

The earliest of the stones which bear motifs features the heart, which is one of the most typical motifs of Pennsylvania German folk art. In Eby (First Mennonite) Cemetery, a tiny heart of 3 cm. in height appears on the stone of Maria Bauman (1831?-1833), who may be the third daughter of Benjamin Bauman and Susannah Bechtel, recorded by Ezra Eby in his indispensible *Biographical History of Waterloo Township* as having "died in infancy." (Fig. 4) The heart is often an image of the earth, out of which the soul is born like a flower.

The concept of the blossoming soul-flower is expressed in the tulips or lilies which center the arch of three stones in Eby (First Mennonite) Cemetery. The earliest of these, for Samuel Clemens (Oct. 5, 1836-Dec. 29, 1836), is arranged in horizontal format, with a handsome lily, its calyx formed of two scrolls and three pointed petals, spreading two graceful leaves across the upper register of the stone. (Fig. 2) This infant was one of eight children of Abraham Clemens (1814-1888) and Magdalena Eby (1810-1833). His paternal grandfather, Jacob Clemens, had come from Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, to Upper Canada, in 1825. There is a tulip of very similar form on the badly worn stone of Anna Eschlemann, daughter of Moses Eschlemann, who may have died in 1847. A distinctive vertical tulip or lily graces the stone of Elizabeth Eby (1787-1844). (Figures 3 and 11) This, perhaps the most beautiful of all those in the "Pennsylvania Style," places the elegantly formed blossom within a rotund central arch, its elaborate calyx flanked by two small curved leaves, and its stem growing from a firmly horizontal earthstroke. (Fig. 11) The German Gothic lettering on this stone is especially graceful, well-cut, and carefully arranged. The lily is perhaps the most ubiquitous and significant of all Pennsylvania German motifs. It suggests the soul as a blossom in Paradise.

The four naive willow trees show variety as to their specific details but uniformity of general appearance. They cannot compare in elegance to the "Ontario Style" willows and are so shallow in their carving that at least one other stone now shows only a trunk, bereft of boughs. The trees are found on the stones of Anna Martin (1775-1836), who was buried at Martin's Meeting House Cemetery just north of Waterloo, Ontario (Fig. 5); Veronica Eby (born and died in 1837) (Fig. 6) and Heinrich Schuh (1785-1837) (Fig. 7), both in Eby (First Mennonite) Cemetery; and Mary Schlichter (died 1840), in Hagey Cemetery near Cambridge (Preston), Ontario. (Fig. 8) These four stones are widely placed but all were carved within four years of one another. The Tree of Life is an im-


*Fig. 5: Willow tree: gravestone for Anna Martin (d. 1836), Martin's Meeting House Cemetery, Waterloo.*

*Fig. 6: Willow tree: gravestone for Veronic Eby (d. 1837), Eby Cemetery.*

*Fig. 7: Willow tree: gravestone for Heinrich Schuh (d. 1837), Eby Cemetery.*


*Fig. 8: Willow tree: gravestone for Mary Schlichter (d. 1840), Hagey Cemetery, Cambridge (Preston).*

portant Pennsylvania German symbol, but these are not *Lebensbaüme*: they are weeping willows, part of the mortuary symbolism of Victorian taste.

The quatrefoil is a motif midway between the floral and the celestial. A kind of astral rosette, it concentrates upon the radiating aspect of both flower and star. The quatrefoil on the tiny stone of Hanna Schantz (1838-1841) enlivens her little memorial with a flower/star of four petals and four leaf-like strokes, (Fig. 9) which blossoms under a firmly incised celestial arch. Hanna[h] Schantz was the daughter of Benjamin Schantz (1811-1868) and Lydia Kolb (1814-1862). The naive carving of the inscription and the dainty but meaningful ornament make this an especially appealing stone.

The *Sechstern* or six-pointed star is a very popular Pennsylvania German motif which has its European origins in Late Classical mortuary art of the Early Christian period. It is usually interpreted as a celestial symbol, appropriately placed in the heavenly arch of the stone for Sarah Bechtel (1809?-1842) in Blair Cemetery. (Fig. 10) Sarah (Sallie) Brower was the wife of John Bechtel; she left eight children, and her husband later married Elizabeth Knechtel.

The latest of the stones bearing motifs in the arch is that of Hiram Thomas (d. 1845), at Eby (First Mennonite) Cemetery. (Fig. 12) Here a shallow arch with two flanking curvatures contains a staring eye, carved with expert precision. Placed in this celestial position, it suggests the "Eye of God," ever watching over the faithful. The Eye of God is an important Masonic motif (and there are a few specifically Masonic stones in Wanner Cemetery), but here it lacks the triangular field and rays of light usually found in its Masonic usage. Gazing with undiminished fidelity, it closes the twelve year period during which such motifs were carved.

As the Ontario Style Stones, richly ornamented with willows, urns, torches, lambs, roses, and gesturing hands, began to be erected in large numbers, the making of stones in the Pennsylvania Style diminished and was abandoned completely by mid-century. The last of these known to the writer is that of Barbara Kinzie (d. 1854) in Kinsie-Biehn Cemetery near Doon, Ontario. Only a few non-stereotyped stones of quartzite appear in these cemeteries. Three of these worthy of note were carved with *Fraktur* lettering for members of the family of Isaac Z. Hunsicker, an active Waterloo County Frakturist, whose distinctive back-hand *Fraktur* style probably served as prototype for the commercial carver. With this exception, the designing of stones was left to commercial stone-cutters of the dominating culture in southern Ontario, whose products, while yielding their own delights, no longer reflected the ethnicity of the dead for whom, in Waterloo Region, they were made.

*Fig. 10: Sechstern: gravestone for Sarah Bechtel (d. 1842), Blair Cemetery.*

*Fig. 9: Quatrefoil: gravestone for Hanna Schantz (d. 1841), Eby Cemetery.*

*Fig. 11: Lily, gravestone for Elizabeth Eby (d. 1844), Eby Cemetery.*

*Fig. 12: Eye: gravestone for Hiram Thomas (d. 1845), Eby Cemetery.*

# Guardian of the Way: The Farmer Preacher, Henry S. Voth (1878-1953)

by Peter Penner

Far too little is known about the generation of farmer-preachers and *Reiseprediger* (itinerant evangelists) who dominated the religious scene among Russian Mennonites between the 1870s and the years following World War I. Only with the creation of archival deposits are we able to rediscover some of their colourful humanity, their considerable achievement despite their general lack of formal education, and, in some cases, their incongruity as ploughmen. One such character was Henry S. Voth (1878-1953) who earned a revered position as a conference leader in the generation before the full-time pastor became common. He was the eldest son of Elder Heinrich Voth (1851-1918), a farmer-preacher and family patriarch in Cottonwood County, Minnesota. He provided much-needed leadership in the pioneering years of the North American Mennonite Brethren Church.[1]

Voth's theory was that farming would yield the primary income, and remuneration from assigned preaching would help cover family needs. Preaching had primacy in the sense of vocation, whereas farming should provide independence and freedom from influence.[2] H. S. Voth, however, was always a little embarrassed that success as a grain farmer eluded him. His calling to evangelize and build the M. B. conference led him away from the farm and family when he should have stayed at home. Seedtime and harvest in their fluctuating seasons at times frustrated his harvesting of souls. He was constantly driven to sow the Word and to rush off to board and conference meetings. Though these were scheduled to avoid peaks of farming activity, the stresses from the combined occupations overwhelmed him at times.

This interacting rhythm of seedtime and harvest can be traced in his preaching diaries. During certain months of spring and fall there were few sermons recorded, and no new texts. The tempo of travelling and preaching increased as the winter progressed, and baptisms would follow in August and September, adding to the joys of "harvest home." We do not know how many persons he might have claimed as having been converted under his ministry, for he baptized only where he was a leading minister, in Oregon, Minnesota, and Manitoba. These numbered 619, by his own count, between 1909 and 1952. He recorded just under 5,000 preaching occasions between 1901 and 1953. This meant travel on bicycle and buggy in the early years, by train on the expanding networks of rail, and later by car. By our count he employed 366 texts, 134 from the Old Testament, 232 from the New. Thus, on the average, each text was used 12 to 14 times.[3]

### Background and education

What kind of influences produced the character and personality of Henry S. Voth? As the son of Heinrich and Sara (Kornelson) Voth, he grew up in a patriarchal, authoritarian home. Praying parents and Sunday School teachers helped bring him to a conversion experience at age thirteen. After four years of backsliding, he received his "call" and soon had his first opportunity to speak during revival meetings.[4] Intense spiritual struggles continued until age 23; nevertheless, the fateful commitment to serve God unstintingly was made in 1895, the year of his baptism. By the end of 1901 he had already been noticed as a hard-working colporteur, having also recorded 26 sermons in North Dakota, Manitoba, and Kansas in that year. His father sent him, rather than an older man, on a delicate church mission to North Dakota.[5]

This parental-spiritual influence, while the dominant one, does not fully explain Voth. Though his education seems quite unexceptional to our generation, his mental development was not neglected. He later evinced a good command of German grammar and composition, both of which facilitated his sermon-making, as well as an independence of thought. Mountain Lake primary and secondary education was followed by teacher training, eventually acquiring a North Dakota teaching certificate (Grade III) on 31 May 1901. Armed with this he taught grade school at Langdon, N.D., travelled during summer months as colporteur, as far away as Lake Superior, and also helped on the farm at home. In 1902 he spent one term at McPherson College, Kansas, and during the next year he took instruction from J. J. Balzer in the *Deutsche-Vorbereintungsschule* (German Preparatory School at Mountain Lake). Whatever other education he received was in the university of experience, through intense "wrestling with the Lord", and by his own self-study.[6]

### Evolution of the preacher

Teaching was, however, not to be his life's work. In 1902 he was appointed *Reiseprediger*, and at age 24

he ranged over the congregations of the *Bundeskonferenz* (General Conference) of the M.B. Church. He had already met and courted his wife-to-be, Susie Warkentin, daughter of Johann Warkentin, a leading minister in Winkler, Manitoba. The distance from Langdon, N.D., to Winkler, one way, is 77 miles; yet he cycled that a number of times on a weekend to win her promise of marriage. This shows something of the physical stamina, determination, and persuasive powers which characterized H. S. Voth. When he married Susie in August 1904 and settled first in Winkler, he was earning $350 a year as a full-time itinerant.[7]

Throughout this period Voth underwent severe struggles over the question of God's enablement. Was God really with him? Could he preach in the power of the Spirit? Was he worthy?[8] In spite of constant encouragement from his father, the brotherhood, and the congregations, he had an almost disastrous early experience in the very church which he would afterward serve for decades, Winkler. Just married, having preached only a dozen times in the area since 1901, he had stage fright at the thought of the older men in the "Amen corner", ran out of things to say, and in his mortification, unthinkingly stepped off the Winkler church dias, a drop of three feet. Only after about three months did he undertake a series of meetings, and then only among people with whom he felt really comfortable, in Harvey, N.D.[9]

Though he was not a systematic theologian and never ranked among the most influential Bible expositors among Mennonite Brethren preachers, he seems to have managed a good balance between the emphasis on salvation and on service. A representative selection of books which he used for his own development in spare hours on the farm includes homiletic aids, sermons which might be described as pietistic and Baptist in orientation, soul-winning guides by C. H. Spurgeon and R. A. Torrey, and treatments of the ordinances, particularly baptism. Voth's reading included much devotional literature and a large assortment of tracts, full of anecdotes, published by Cranston and Curtis in Cincinnati. The remains of his library show that H. S. Voth was preoccupied with eschatology (the doctrine of last things) and tended towards dispensationalism.[10]

His sermon titles indicate that he placed the "two ways" clearly before his auditors. Among his favourite evangelistic texts were Luke 23, "Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise"; Matthew 11, "Come unto Me all who labour . . ."; Genesis 19, "Salvation [of Lot] as by fire"; and Luke 19:1-10, "Zachaeus". He was not above using fear of judgment to come to persuade people into a decision. His brother-in-law Ben Warkentin (now age 89) still remembers how he was "scared into the church" at age fourteen. His hermeneutics was too literalistic for a younger generation, including some of his children, though this literalism was in complete harmony with the prevailing fundamentalism which many Mennonite Brethren had adopted.[11]

It is obvious that as an evangelist and popular speaker, Voth employed mostly well-known texts and achieved success through repetition of the same truth before different audiences with a great variety of anecdotal material.[12] He was a great topical preacher who could embellish a point. For example, using the text, "If the righteous scarcely be saved . . .", he would ruminate on that word *scarcely* until he could sense people bending to his persuasion. Or he would employ ever more practical and pointed anecdotes. Then, in order to ensure that his meaning was not misunderstood, he would bring his message to the point of offering direction to his listeners, an offer that could hardly be refused without leaving the person without some measure of guilt. As the record indicates, he could move people to respond to the Word. In many ways, Voth stood in a class by himself as an evangelist.[13]

In spite of this approach, Voth gave *service* its due emphasis: stewardship, discipleship, church attendance, family worship, surrender, missions—a good balance between Mary's contemplative habits and Martha's activity (Luke 10). He himself at one point volunteered to go as a missionary, as did his brother John.

*Susie and Henry S. Voth with Esther, Harry and Sarah.*

As to his style, his was a commanding presence. People remember his measured tread on entrance, his flashing eye, and flowing wavy hair. He was a stylist and orator and, to accentuate a point, would slap the pulpit with the palm of his hand. In North Dakota once, he split a pulpit top by such a violent blow. These were overtones of Billy Sunday who, the family believes, greatly influenced him, though Voth never imitated Sunday to the extent of climbing chairs and using other forms of exhibitionism.[14]

**The first thirty years**

It will be helpful to divide Voth's career broadly into two periods: the first thirty years (1901-1931), and the last twenty. The first period contains four distinct segments, each of which prepared him for his

*Top, Mennonite Brethren Church, Bingham Lake, Minnesota.*
*Above, Heinrich Voth with his sons—seated: John, Heinrich, and Henry; standing: Isaac, Jacob, Peter, and Abram.*

later influential career as a conference personality. The first segment (1903-1908) as a full-time *Reiseprediger* corresponded to the rapid influx of American Mennonites into the new province of Saskatchewan. He enjoyed great success in 1905 when upwards of 100 converted in the Laird-Ebenfeld area.[15] In 1908 his activity peaked at 218 sermons, the second highest of his career. Ordained in Winkler in 1907, he answered the call to serve small congregations in Dallas and Portland, Oregon, made up of migrating Mennonites and Germans. Here, from 1908 to 1915, he ran a 23-acre plum farm, and felled trees in the forest to augment his income. He also had the physical and mental stamina, it seems, to include the growing Pacific District Conference in his preaching circuit.[16]

In 1915 Henry and Susie Voth responded to the call from Heinrich and Sara Voth to return to the family farm. Heinrich confessed in correspondence that he was tired after giving 30 years of leadership to the Bingham Lake (Carson) M.B. Church, and was looking for a place to retire. These were stressful years for the entire family. Not only did H.S. seem to exhaust his emotional resources by preaching a record 275 sermons in 1916 (all except 36 in American M.B. churches); but also the strains of the next two years, when America joined in the war against Germany, brought him to nervous exhaustion. One night in April 1917 his brothers Isaac and Abe left for Manitoba to evade the draft.[17] Henry was left with the farm, though he still managed three or four sermons a week on circuit. The melancholia deepened in 1918 when his life was endangered by American patriots who resented the Mennonites for their pacifism and German-language-use. For example, while preaching in Nebraska, some Brethren took him to his host farm by a circuitous route because they knew some patriots were lying in wait at a certain bridge to ambush Voth—perhaps to tar and feather him.[18]

More distressing was the departure of his parents, with Isaac and Abe, for Vanderhoof, B.C., to take up a new homestead. Most disheartening was the death there of his father on November 26, 1918. He had just made the long trip to the Northern District Conference in Winkler and had visited Henry and Susie in Minnesota. While there he had been interrogated by the "secret police" (*Geheimpolizei*) who asked about his sons, particularly Isaac and Abe.[19]. The family burden was also getting heavier, as Henry and Susie now had five children and their financial situation was always precarious.[20] The results of these stresses are reflected in his preaching diary. From that high of 275 appointments in 1916, they fell off yearly to 177, 70, 69, to a low of 38 in 1920.

H. S. recovered from this depressed emotional and financial condition by moving to Roland, Manitoba (not far from Winkler) in 1919. Aided generously by his father-in-law, and cheered by his wife, Henry found a new role which prepared him for his years of leadership in the Winkler congregation. For his itinerant evangelism he was paid as high as $100 a month, plus travel. He even acquired a new suit by what might be called hindsightful ways. His son John L. writes:

> One winter when Mother was preparing Dad's clothes for his trip she found out his Sunday pants had worn out on the seat. There was no money for a new pair. She put two neat patches on the pants and sent Dad on his way. The Brethren took due note of Dad's dilemma and when he came home he was wearing a brand new suit of clothes.[21]

While these were relatively good years and H. S. farmed a half-section of land, it is necessary to point out that Voth's family was basically unhappy with him as the increasingly famous conference man.

**The conference man**

The second major period of H. S. Voth's life encompassed the years 1931 to 1950, when he moved to his father-in-law's own farm nearer Winkler, and succeeded him as moderator of the church.[22] These were the years of his personal rejoicings over large baptisms and of his domi-

nant influence—first among equals—as conference leader. Two years after settling in the Winkler area, he was chosen moderator of the Northern District (Canadian) Conference and served in that capacity almost uninterruptedly until 1947.[23] Known far and wide, he greatly increased his influence in the M.B. Church.

But life in the Winkler M.B. Church in the 'twenties was not made easy by the large influx of Mennonite families from Russia, including such leaders as Abram H. Unruh and Johann G. Wiens. When Unruh founded the Winkler Bible School in 1925, these men were seen to have a dominant influence over the younger minds. Though Voth received the wholehearted support of these brethren, nevertheless he always felt somewhat inferior to those better trained than himself, particularly to J. G. Wiens.[24] Somewhat overwhelmed by these and other respected Bible expositors (A. H. Unruh, D. D. Derksen, and J. S. Reimer), Voth acutely felt his essential Americanness. He felt happier among his intimate friends in the *Bundeskonferenz* such as H. W. Lohrentz of Tabor College, P. C. Hiebert, R. C. Seibel, and W. J. Bestvater (city missionary in Winnipeg, 1913-1921).

Nevertheless, Voth took satisfaction from his repeated election as conference moderator on the Canadian scene, in spite of a regulation adopted in 1927 that no one should be moderator more than three years running. Some thought him peerless in giving direction and balance to a conference. He was a great inspirational leader, gentle but firm, and his guidelines were given respectful attention.[25]

To be moderator or his stand-in, was also to be a member of the weighty *Fuersorgekomitee* (Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns) which, for example, had to deal with such distressful matters as congregational separations. When this happened in Reedley in 1925, over the issue of "discipline", H. S. Voth was one of four brethren appointed to attempt a reconciliation between the mother church and the group that split off. Failing that, the committee desired that the two congregations should live in fellowship. Such a reconciliation was achieved between Reedley and Dinuba, but not without imposing considerable strain on all concerned, not the least on Voth.[26]

For 27 years (1927-1953) H. S. Voth served on the prestigious Board of Foreign Missions. In the year he died, M.B. Foreign Missions supervised the activities in six countries of about 140 missionaries (more than 60 in Zaire, over 40 in India), and raised over $400,000 annually.[27]

Voth was also a spokesman for Tabor College, serving on its board for seven years. (Tabor became a conference school in 1935.) There, too, Voth found himself at the center of a storm in early 1945. There was an outcry from various sources about the degree of intermingling of male and female students at Tabor. President P. E. Schellenberg was sharply criticized for permitting "socials" as an innovation which strained the ethical canons thought to be in force. P. R. Lange, Voth's friend, wondered whether "we are at the point of disintegration or . . . at the beginning of a great forward stride as a Conference.[28] Voth also gave six years as chairman of the Winkler Bible School board, following the departure of A. H. Unruh to found the M.B. Bible College in 1944, in Winnipeg.[29]

In the aftermath of the war the cause of the *Hilfswerk* (MCC) increasingly claimed his attention. In many ways his views here reflected the position Mennonite Brethren have taken towards MCC. In a letter to B. B. Janz, Coaldale, regarding the Mennonite thrust in aid of refugees, Voth wrote that he could not stand by idly while others worked. The Brethren should support the effort heartily and rally behind their fellow M.B., who was chairman of MCC, P. C. Hiebert. He was, after all, "a strong man, a solid M.B. churchman, and of sound views as to how to proceed in the stabilization of the Mennonite Church in Europe." But the following lines were characteristic: "Above all, we should never neglect evangelism. That would heal, help, and save!"[30] That was one of the great questions: could *Hilfswerk* ever be evangelistic enough?

Not least of his concerns was the cause of home missions. Mission work beyond the pale of the local congregations, known as *Randmission*, began for Manitoba and for Voth personally when he was asked to baptize new believers at Lindal, south-west of Morden. As a result of a revival among Czech and other ethnic peoples there in 1935-6, the Manitoba conference began an active search for additional outposts, such as Winnipegosis. Along with B. B. Janz and A. A. Kroeker, H. S. Voth took a leading part in the conceptualization of the Canada Inland Mission in 1943-4 as an umbrella organ of the Canadian Conference for home missions. The Canadian Inland Mission would help to employ those young people who had already gone out under other missions, and prevent them from stumbling into tendencies foreign to the "M.B. way."[31]

**Family relationships**

It was during the Roland years (1919-1931), when Voth adhered stubbornly to the independence of the farmer-preacher, that his children began to build up resistance to the "M.B. way." Though circumstances for Canadian farmers generally improved during these years, the succeeding depression drove grain prices down and the monthly stipend for *Reisepreidger* went down accordingly, to about $30. But a weak financial position was not the chief reason for family tensions. The children felt that their father placed the Conference and Church before family and farm, while mother sometimes placed father before children. During the winter months father was away weeks without end, it seemed, and during the farming months they were taken in the 1917 Model T Ford to Kronsgart and Morden, a different congregation each Sunday. Besides they missed their more intimate friends in Minnesota. At the Debonair School, Roland, they were called "Bloody Minites", even after the Great War. Consequently, as John wrote recently, during this decade they showed almost "no tendency toward religion". Though there were daily devotions, with or

without father, what they saw as the fundamental legalism which demanded confession of sins, surrender of the will, and implied a threat of eternal loss did not appeal to them. And when their father addressed Johnny's Grade XII graduation from the Winkler High School in 1929 on the subject of "the Christian family", H. S. stated specifically that his own family was not the model he had in mind.[32] Ultimately, only three of his children joined the M.B. Church.

Fortunately there never was a serious problem about providing his children with sufficient education in order to prepare them for a suitable place in society. There was however an inveterate struggle to maintain the traditional family paternalism. Whereas Harry, the eldest, early left home, John Lester stayed to break new ground by demanding payment for work on the family farm. This reflected the struggle on the part of the children for religious, social, and occupational freedom. Father relented and John went off to Berkeley about 1935 with $700 in order to study chemistry. Esther attended Bible school in Winkler and Winnipeg; Sara qualified as a teacher in Manitoba; Ruth went to Tabor College and then to California; and Reuben, the youngest, remained on the farm.[33]

Yet, it was well before John went to the University of Manitoba that he, and later Ruth, came to recognize how deeply many congregations respected the preaching and character of their father. They also came to appreciate his sermons as works of art, and generally stood in awe of their father's native ability. Ruth compared her father's preparation for a delivery of a Sunday sermon as the work of an "artistic temperament—coming up to a performance". She recalls how on Sunday morning her father measured the length of the house as he strode back and forth, rehearsing his sermon in sort of a mutter. At times he would show considerable irritation when the children were too noisy. A hired man has reminded John that the Voth kids got their best lickings on Sunday morning.[34]

There is no doubt that Voth felt the burden of this family disillusionment. He tried in his last decade of active travelling to maintain contact with the family, and he never entirely gave up the attempt to win his children over to his persuasion. In 1943, on his way to Hillsboro in *The Rocket*, he wrote from Kansas City, sharing some of his innermost feelings, including homesickness. There had been heavy rains, numerous washouts, and extensive travel delays. On board, too, were A. H. Unruh and other Canadian Brethren. Voth was tired, exhausted. "God help us!", he wrote, "It will not be easy. Besides [and this was an increasing problem] the conference will be almost entirely in English, and I doubt I will stay until Sunday." In closing he tucked in a cheque in the amount of $10.[35]

Two years later, on a combined visit to the Reedley Conference and to John's in San Francisco, and accompanied now by his wife Susie, H. S. tried once more to win over his second son. They all went to hear Handel's *Messiah* performed in an Episcopalian church. John remembers how the conversation with his father went: "At breakfast... Dad posed a hypothetical question, speaking of the priest we had seen at the performance the night before. Suppose a man came to the priest and cried: 'Save me. I am a poor lost sinner'. What would the priest do? 'He would know what to do,' I said. 'He would send him to the Holy Rollers[!]' No more was said at the time, but some years later, on another visit, Dad asked me if I recalled the conversation. 'You know, John', he said, 'I liked your reply'."[36]

*Front: Susie, Reuben, and Henry S. Voth; Back: John L., Sarah, Ruth, Esther, and Harry.*

**The last years**

Even the last eight years were not without their anxieties. In 1945 the Winkler Church arranged for Voths to live very near Winkler, but still left them largely dependent on the farm, now run by Reuben. Whereas the mortgage had been "lifted", to use John's term, during the War, Reuben once married found it difficult to provide for two families from the half-section. The dilemma before H. S. when he died on 23 October 1953 was an old one: shall we take another loan, hopefully thereby to increase productivity, or shall we sell?

In fact, financial questions plagued Voth all his life. If he was not facing untoward expense on the farm, he was worrying about how to finance a trip to conference somewhere. John paid for his mother's trip to California in 1945, and even helped to keep them in Davis during the winter of 1950-51. H. S. had resigned the Winkler leadership, having felt some pressure to do so. Though he never really relaxed when away from Winkler, he was

also not the one to take up his son's suggestion that he should write his memoirs.[37]

Death by heart failure does not seem to have come unexpectedly to him. There had been premonitions at various times, not to mention the serious illnesses which marked his career.[38]

The eulogies following his death were many. Letters came to Susie Voth from near and far, not least from missionaries abroad, who valued their association with Voth as their advocate and supporter on the Board at home, as well as from the Conference leadership. And Sara in her own eulogy wrote: "We were privileged to have been Dad's Children."[39]

If H. S. Voth lacked extensive theological education, and even if he failed somewhat with his children—a malady not reserved only for *Reiseprediger*—he had many winning ways with his German-speaking Mennonite farmers and their families. They knew he understood their joys and frustrations, as farming folk. Advanced theology or clinical training hardly seemed necessary. There was no identity problem, at least not until the coming of the "Russian" Mennonites in the 1920s. Before that, Voth's Americanness suited the new congregations formed in Saskatchewan from the American influx of 1900-1910. He also, like them, was a self-made man, who had in part been driven to Canada only by wartime American intolerance, and also by the rapid language change underway immediately following the Great War.

His life and archival remains suggest a research topic vital for our understanding of the period when the *Reiseprediger* peaked in their activity. Without extensive research there is no way of knowing how Voth compared with his kind quantitatively or qualitatively. Though he was not a farmer, C. N. Hiebert (1881-1975) provides one comparison. His career as colporteur, evangelist, city missionary, not to mention his European ministry paralleled Voth's in many ways.[40] Did these early servants of the spreading congregations of German speaking immigrants stem the flow into existing denominations, or into those considered heretical, like the Adventists? What percentage loss in potential membership was there, even in *Reiseprediger families?* How successful were they in forming up new "conversion-emphasizing" congregations among immigrant communities?[41]

Whatever the conclusions might be from such a comparative survey of Voth's contemporaries, they could hardly detract from the fact that Voth cut a large swath in the M.B. Church for many a year. He had been involved in all the large questions which faced his Church during the first half of this century.

NOTES

[1] Clarence Hiebert. "The Development of the Mennonite Brethren Church in North America", in Paul E. Toews, ed., *Pilgrims and Strangers* (Fresno, 1977), 111ff; J. A. Froese, *Witness Extraordinary: A Biography of Elder Heinrich Voth* (1851-1918). 1975.

[2] Heinrich Voth, *"Vorteile und Nachteile"* (advantages and disadvantages) of being a farmer-preacher, File No. 8, H. S. Voth Collection, M.B. Archives, Winnipeg.

[3] The main preaching diary, covering the years 1915-1952, and containing a list of all the persons Voth baptized, was made available by Mrs. Esther (Voth) Enns, Winkler. Other diaries covering the years from 1901 are in the H. S. Voth Collection, M.B. Archives, Winnipeg.

All sermon data are from these sources. Frank Brown, *History of Winkler* (1973) claims Voth preached 5744 sermons, though he does not give his source.

[4] Isaac H. Voth, "Rev. H. S. Voth", *Konferenz-Jugendblatt* (June 1946), 4; John L. Voth, "Recollections of My Father" (unpublished paper, 1980), 2.

[5] H. S. Voth Collection; *General Conference/M.B. Yearbook* (1901), 11.

[6] H. S. Voth Collection; *Mennonite Encyclopedia (ME)* III, 761; J. A. Toews. *History of the M.B. Church* (1975), 268-9.

[7] *GC/MB Yearbook* (1904), 5, 6, 14; John L. Voth 2; *ME*, IV, 280.

[8] H. S. Voth's "Diary" for these years. M.B. Archives.

[9] J. L. Voth, 2; 1904 is the likely date for this event, though one cannot be absolutely certain. He still managed to preach 142 times that year.

[10] See J. B. Toews; analysis of the theological leadership in the M.B. Church, in Paul E. Toews, ed., 134ff.

On the subject of baptism, there is one item in Voth's library which strikes the researcher as very odd: a book published in 1898 by Mennonite Publishing Co., Elkhart, by Rev. R. A. Mackay entitled *Immersion Proved to be NOT a Scriptural Mode of Baptism, but a Romish Invention*[!]

[11] Peter Penner, "Ben Warkentin, Educator and Sage", *Mennonite Reporter* (31 October 1977), 17; J. B. Toews, in Paul E. Toews, ed., 144ff.

[12] Voth methodically recorded where he had given each sermon, so as not to be embarrassed by repetition.

[13] G. D. Bries Interview with the author (6 August 1981), in Winnipeg; H. S. Voth's sermonette "Selbatbeherrschung (Self-Control)", *Konferenz-Jugendblatt* (1 March/1939), 10.

[14] Taped Interview with Esther, Ruth, and Reuben in Winkler (5 August 1981).

[15] F. H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1876-1920* (Toronto, 1974), 303ff; E. J. Berg's nostalgic letter to Mrs. Susie Voth (24 October 1966), in the Sara (Voth) Klippenstein Collection.

[16] J. L. Voth, 5; Taped Interview.

[17] H. and S. Voth, Bingham Lake, to H. S. Voth, Dallas, Oregon (Penny postcards), (19 July 1912; 7 June 1917), Sara Klippenstein Collection.

[18] J. L. Voth, 2; Taped Interview.

[19] H. Voth to H. S. Voth, from Jasper, Alberta (4 November 1918); J. V. Neufeld (grandson), "The Mennonite Settlement at Vanderhoof in the Nechako Valley" (unpublished family account, with pictures), 1978; Neufeld argues that without the pressures of World War Two there would have been no Vanderhoof settlement at that time.

[20] The frustrations of Henry's last year on the Minnesota farm and of Susie as a straw widow, and the anxieties over the sale of that farm are reflected in H. S. and Susie's letters to Mrs. H. Voth, Vanderhoof (27 April 1919). Klippenstein Collection. Taped Interview (5 August 1981).

[21] J. L. Voth, 3.

[22] Peter Penner, "By Reason of Strength: Johann Warkentin, 1859-1948", *ML* (December 1978), 4-9; this article has pictures of Susie with her family, and of the Warkentin farmhouse where the Voths lived from 1945.

[23] *Northern District (Canadian) Conference Yearbook (NDCYb)* (1922), 6; (1925), 3-3; (1927), 14-34; (1929), 49-55. All told, Voth was Canadian Conference moderator for 21 years, assistant for 2. Only illness prevented him in 1939 and 1940. At the General Conference level he was assistant moderator for 19 years (from 1927 onwards); in the Manitoba Conference, moderator for at least 6 years. Cf. *ME*, IV, where his brother Abram's calculations differ somewhat. G. D. Pries interview.

[24] G. D. Pries, *A Place Called Peniel: Winkler Bible Institute, 1925-75* (1975), 67-72. Wiens attended the Hamburg Theological Seminary, from Russia, as early as 1899, lived in England subsequently, served as a missionary in India, and founded a Bible Institute in the Crimea during Lenin's time, Pries *Peniel*, 19; J. A. Toews, 161-3.

[25] G. D. Pries interview with the author, 6 August 1981; actually Henry and other members of the Voth family never became Canadian citizens.

[26] H. S. Voth Collection, File No. 15; A. H. Unruh. *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde* (1954), 474.

[27] *GC/MB Yearbook* (1954), 73ff

[28] P. R. Lange to H. S. Voth (12 February 1945), in File No. 15. Cf. J. A. Toews, *History*, 268ff.

[29] Pries. *Peniel*, 32.

[30] H. S. Voth to B. P. Janz (10 September 1946, freely translated), in File No. 16.

[31] Peter Penner, "Twenty-One Years of Witnessing at Lindal", *Mennonite Observer* (9 March 1956), 5; *Manitoba Conference Yearbook* (June 1936), No. 6; (September 1936), 7; (June, 1944), 7-8; *Alberta Conference Yearbook* (November, 1944), 6.

[32] Taped Interview.

[33] Taped Interview; J. L. Voth "Recollections".

[34] J. L. Voth, 4; Taped Interview; Ruth to the author (27 November 1981).

[35] H. S. Voth to Susie and Reuben (21 May 1943).

[36] J. L. Voth, 6.

[37] J. L. Voth, 6; H. S. Voth to Johnny (4 July 1945; 11 October 1950); H. S. Voth to the Winkler M. B. Church Council (4 September 1950).

[38] He was seriously ill, as stated, in 1917-18; attended the Hepburn Conference in 1930 but was too ill to take the chair; and was very ill in 1939 and 1940, when his preaching dropped to a low of 20; Taped Interview.

[39] J. A. Wiebe, Mahbubnagar [A. P.], India, on behalf of India missionaries to Susie (Warkentin) Voth (20 January 1954). J. A. Toews, Canadian Conference Moderator, to Susie Voth (28 October 1953); Sarah (Voth) Klippenstein, "A Daughter Remembers", *Christian Leader* (1 January 1954), 16.

[40] Esther (Hiebert) Horch, *C. N. Hiebert Was My Father* (Winnipeg, 1979).

[41] Clarence Hiebert, *op. cit.*, 111ff.

# The Anabaptist Vision: From Recovery to Reform

by J. Denny Weaver

The last decode has seen the crystalization of a new era in the interpretation of Anabaptist origins—from the monogenesis view of Harold S. Bender to the polygenesis perspective which emerged beginning in the 1960's and was articulated succinctly in a 1975 article.[1] This newer perspective argues that rather than arising solely from within the Zwinglian reformation as a homogeneous religious movement, Anabaptism was actually a varigated movement not uniformly pacifist, with several independent beginning points and divers intellectual and political and historical origins. Although polygenesis has been around in some form for a number of years, little consideration has been given to its theological implications and significance for the self understanding of the contemporary church. Further, while Mennonite academics have generally welcomed the newly articulated view,[2] the discussion of multiple origins itself has not really moved beyond academic circles. One notes for example that neither the first, historically oriented volume of the Foundation Series nor the newly published lesson series on Mennonite history from Faith and Life Press shows any awareness of historical analysis since Bender.[3] I think that the revised view of Anabaptist origins has some rather significant implications for the self-understanding of contemporary Mennonite churches. What follows is an initial attempt to develop some of these implications. Comments on historiography in both text and notes are not exhaustive but are meant to illustrate and provide samples of the perspectives in question.

In order to disassociate Anabaptism from Thomas Muentzer who was viewed as a social revolutionary, Bender argued that Anabaptism began in Zurich. For the same reason, the Bender school of interpretation also argued for a purely religious impetus to the Anabaptist reformation. His *Conrad Grebel*, for example, virtually eliminates all formative influences on Grebel except the Bible.[4] Anabaptists emerge as the sixteenth century individuals most serious about following Jesus and heeding the message of Scripture, and following Jesus.[5] This assessment of origins thus per force distinguishes various reforming movements on the basis of sincerity. It evaluates Anabaptists as open to God's truth, whereas Zwingli, Luther, Muentzer, and others hear and heed merely human opinion or compromise God's truth.

Revisionist scholars have "demythologized" Anabaptist origins. They have identified at least three points of origin and six distinct sixteenth century Anabaptist movements. Alongside or even superseding their religious components, these movements display a multiplicity of social and economic and political and revolutionary causes as well as intellectual antecedents which include monasticism, humanism, mysticism, nominalism and ascenticism. For some of those steeped in the tradition of Bender, articulation of these multiple origins and lack of homogeneous theological movement may feel like a betraval of the received faith or the denial of a biblical basis to Mennonite theology.

The revisionist perspective actually places Anabaptist origins and ideas on the same value level as other traditions. For all movements, these origins are explainable in terms of secondary causes, accessible to anyone in possession of the tools of historical scholarship. Anabaptist origins and ideas play in the same historical arena as other movements, with the questions of sincerity and obedience and truthfulness removed to another level for all traditions. With all traditions placed on the same historical footing and evaluations of truth removed to another level, ecumenical discussions can have a less emotional beginning point and can commence with more common understandings. The revisionist perspective is thus an ally in transtraditional comparisons and discussions. It can help us to see dialogue among traditions as mutually recognized authentic attempts to find truth, with the key questions concerning such things as hermeneutical or ethical presuppositions, rather than using dialogue to attempt to establish the superior sincerity or discipleship commitment of one tradition over another.

To make the same point another way, the recent scholarship distinguishes more clearly than did the Bender generation between causes and influences in the historical realm accessible to anyone, and those value judgments which fall into a confessional realm or are accessible only to faith. We now know, for example, that a minority of Swiss Anabaptists were not pacifist; and that some Swiss Anabaptists became pacifist at least partially by trial and error and for pragmatic reasons.[6] These conclusions stand on the historical evidence rather than on one's ideological commitment to pacifism; accepting the

evidence is independent of one's judgment concerning the truth of pacifism. The Bender generation did attempt to answer some kinds of historical questions and to evaluate people and movements historically on the basis of confessionally based data. Thus for example, Balthasar Hubmaier, who participated in the disputations in Zurich and who provided the first major theological defenses of believers baptism, was not considered a real Anabaptist because of his opposition to pacifism.[7] Pacifism was one of the constitutive elements, Bender believed, which placed the Anabaptist movement on a higher plane than the Lutheran or Zwinglian reformations (it was the "culmination of the Reformation") and enabled him to conclude that the magisterial reformers had compromised the gospel.[8] However, it is a confession of faith to identify the pacifist stance as the true one or to attribute its development to divine leading or to greater seriousness about following Jeus. We have long recognized the human elements in Luther's reformation. Revisionist scholarship makes plain the same element in the Anabaptist movement. Recent scholarship has similarly shown that the idea of a free church did not arrive full blown when Grebel's Zurich circle read the Bible under divine guidance. Rather, it evolved over a period of time, after the failure of attempts to form a mass church.[9] It is a confession of faith then to accept this model of church as the most biblical or as the most faithful way to follow Jesus.

Revisionist scholarship has thus put moderns on the same level as their sixteenth century counterparts. One has a choice of saying the sixteenth century personalities have been reduced in stature or that moderns have grown to theirs. In either case, moderns are now as conscious of the foibles of sixteenth century figures as of their own. Decisions are taken the same way by both eras—by trial and error, in specific historical situations, with much searching and testing. For both past and present personalities, to the extent that it can be done, their intent is to discover in their own context the shape of God's people and the meaning of following Jesus and the way to make visible or witness to the kingdom of God. In the new era, I am more comfortable with my genuinely human — demythologized — ancestors and their infallible thought than with the heroic figures and pristine theology of the earlier version. Thus I am more willing to identify with their legacy in its contemporary form.

The above analysis makes it virtually self-evident that the revisionist scholarship leads the way toward a fundamental reorientation in the understanding of what it means to stand in the Anabaptist tradition. This reorientation is actually a shifting in time of the point which we identify as the one providing the religious framework of contemporary life.

The Bender generation had a tripartite division of history, one common to the self-perception of many movements—religious as well as non-religious. The tripartite division of history visualizes an original, golden age, followed by a 'dark' or 'middle' age, which loses the original vision. Finally there is a period of restoration of the original vision.[10] Following the lead of Neo-Orthodoxy in defining a homogeneous reformation theology, Harold Bender described the Anabaptist Vision of the sixteenth century as a pristine theological movement.[11] Lost by Mennonites in the centuries following the Reformation, the Vision was a model to be copied and recovered in the present.[12] Particularly in popularized versions of the Bender perspective, sixteenth century Anabaptist personages and martyrs were held up as prophetic models. The modern heirs to that tradition were called to measure themselves against the heroic model of the spiritual ancestors, to adopt their program and to partake of their courage in carrying it out. Most of us learned we were the dwarfs standing on giants' shoulders.[13] This perspective of the Bender school uses the Anabaptist past as a lodestone. Although there is a distinct present emphasis through use of the past to focus the present, the orientation of the view remains nonetheless to the past.. It is essentially an attitude of conservation. It assumes a past, finished product which must be recovered and preserved.

In the revisionist perspective, standing in the Anabaptist tradition must inevitably assume a feeling quite different from restoring the "Anabaptist Vision" described by Bender. The revisionist scholars have not articulated systematically a way for Mennonites to stand in the wake of the origins they describe. However, I believe revisionist scholarship implies a fundamentally different orientation from the Bender school. Given the multiple origins and differing early 'visions' or impulses, one can no longer focus on the one vision to be recovered and preserved. Rather, one is confronted by a number of impulses, some in conflict with each other.[14] all of which continue to influence contemporary life and thought.[15] To take seriously all the elements which comprise the tradition means a refusal to absolutize any one set of them. They all comprise part of the story, teaching both positively and negatively.[16] This context forces the contemporary church to be present and future oriented. The past provides direction and orientation, but present and future needs and problems dictate the agenda and the focus of questions to be asked. While there is a distinct past emphasis through use of the past to provide historical identity and continuity to the present, the orientation remains nonetheless to the present and the future. This is essentially a liberal outlook, that is, one which accepts change. It assumes that the movement is never finished but rather is always in a state of becoming Anabaptist or re-forming the Anabaptism legacy. Thus the advent of the new era in the understanding of Anabaptist origins means switching from the idea of recovery to the principle of continual formation and reformation of the legacy. The new historiography leaves us without pristine role models and unambiguous historical precedents. Rather than inheriting a finished product, our legacy consists of a movement in the process of becoming. We can only continue to search together for the shape to give contemporary Anabaptism. Rather than recovering it, we are

called—but also compelled—continually to forge new versions of the vision. Although we learn from the experiences of our spiritual ancestors, like they did, we also live and work on the cutting edge. It is an anxious as well as an exhilarating experience.

NOTES

[1] James M. Stayer, Werner Packull, and Klaus Depperman, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49.2 (April 1975):83-121. A major analysis of evidence is in Hans-Jurgen Goertz, ed., *Umstrittenes Taufertum 1525-1975: Neue Forschungen* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1975). The first synthetic history of Anabaptism from the polygenesis perspective in Hans-Jurgen Goertz, *Die Taufer: Geschichte und Deutung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1980).

[2] See, for example, Stayer's comment in "Reflections and Retractions On Anabaptists and the Sword," MQR 51.3 (July 1977): 197, and John S. Oyer's listing of Mennonite scholars who in various ways qualified Bender's view and have contributed to the polygenesis perspective. "Goertz' 'History and Theology': A Response," MQR 53.3 (July 1979): 194-96.

[3] John Driver, *Becoming God's Community*, Foundation Series, vol. 1 (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1981); Rudy Baergen, *The Mennonite Story* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life, 1981).

[4] Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel, c. 1498-1526: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren Sometimes Called Anabaptists*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 6 (Goshen, Ind., Mennonite Historical Society, 1950; reprint ed., Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1971), pp. 79-81, 192-203.

[5] Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision", *Church History* 13.1 (March 144): 3-24 and MQR 18.2 (April 1944): 67-88; "The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Muntzer, and the Anabaptists." MQR 27.1 (January 1953): 15; "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship", MQR 24.1 (January 1950): 25-32.

[6] James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronado Press, 1972; reprint ed. 1976), pp. 99ff; "The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition," *Church History* 47.2 (June 1978): 177, 181; "Reublin and Brotli: The Revolutionary Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism," in Marc Lienhard, ed., *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism /Les debuts et les caracteristiques de l'anabaptisme*, International Archives of the History of Ideas, no. 87 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, pp. 83-102. Marxist historiography is partially responsible for developing the revolutionary origins of some Anabaptists. See Abraham Friesen, "The Marxist Interpretation of Anabaptism," *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 1 (1970): 17-34; and *Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and its Antecedents*, Veroffentlichungen des Instituts fur Europaische Geschichte Mainz, vol. 71 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974).

[7] John Horsch, "Is Dr. Kuehler's Conception of Early Dutch Anabaptism Historically Sound? I," MQR 7.1 (January 1933): 50-52; C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1941), p. 63; Harold S. Bender and Ernst Correll, review of *The Story of the Mennonites*, by C. Henry Smith, MQR 16.4 (October 1942): 273.

[8] "Anabaptist Vision," Ch. 13.1 (March 1944): 9, 13 and MQR 18.2 (April 1944): 74, 78.

[9] Goertz, *Die Taufer*, p. 23.

[10] There can be an interlocking complex of original visions to be restored. For example, Bender understands the Swiss Brethren as having recovered the idea of following Jesus. Thus to recover the Anabaptist vision means simultaneously to recover first century Christianity, or to imitate the sixteenth century recovery of the recovery of first century Christianity.

[11] Point made by James Stayer, "The Swiss Brethren," p. 175.

[12] Note, for example, the title of Guy Hershberger, ed., *Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, (Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957; 3rd printing, 1972), and its pp. 25-27.

[13] Walter Klaassen has written of those who engage in "breast beating" and "wallaw in guilt" for having failed to uphold the heroic model. *Anabaptism: Both Positive and Negative*, Word and World, no. 1 (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1975), p. 6.

[14] For example, see Bender-Correll, pp. 272-73 and C. Henry Smith's response, "A Communication From C. Henry Smith Concerning the Review of his Book 'The Story of the Mennonites'," MQR 17.4 (October 1943): 248-49.

[15] Theron Schalabach has described four contemporary versions of the vision. "The End of Mennonite History," *Christian Living* 28.10 (October 1981): 22-24.

[16] See Klaassen, pp. 7-8.

# "Plautdietsch": Some Impressions About Mennonite Low German in Kansas and Nebraska

**by Robert H. Buchheit**

During the last five years I have had an opportunity to acquaint myself with a good many German-Americans and their German dialects on the Great Plains. I have been able to compare and contrast the various German-speaking groups with respect to their ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. I discovered that although the groups have much in common, they also differ greatly, particularly in their religious and linguistic backgrounds. One reason for this variation is that some of the immigrants came directly to the United States from the German-speaking countries of western Europe while others spent a century or longer in the eastern European countries of Poland and Hungary or in Russia before coming to the United States in late nineteenth century.

One of the groups among the Russian-Germans was the Mennonites from the Molotschna Colony, who settled in Nebraska and south-central Kansas. These immigrants brought with them a Low German dialect known as "Plautdietsch," which has been of particular interest to me during the past five years. In some ways it is different from other Low German dialects that I have encountered on the Great Plains. It serves not only as a distinguishing characteristic of the Russian-German Mennonites but also surpasses most if not all other forms of Low German in the number of active speakers, in the overall condition of the dialect itself, and in the opportunities for linguistic research. In fact, whenever I need a concrete example to illus-

trate a particular linguistic phenomenon of German settlement dialects in the United States, I invariably return to "Plautdietsch," due to my greater experience with it and more importantly, because I am fairly certain that "Plautdietsch" will contain the examples that I am seeking.

The following comments contain some of my impressions about "Plautdietsch," which I have collected during my linguistic field work among the Russian-German Mennonites of Kansas and Nebraska. As a nonnative speaker of the dialect I had to discover the sound system and the grammatical structure by listening to many hours of recorded speech on tape. This enabled me to gain an understanding of the meaningful units of sound and form, much in the same manner as children must have learned "Plautdietsch" from their parents and grandparents over the years. This method gave me valuable insights into the process of learning a second language without the aid of a grammar text. Since that time I have attempted to incorporate some of these techniques, such as extensive listening, into my own teaching of standard German.

As a nonnative speaker, I had the additional advantage of being able to maintain some distance from the speakers and their "Plautdietsch," which is important for objectively analyzing the structure, estimating the number of speakers, and determining the rate of retention of "Plauddietsch" vis-a-vis other German settlement dialects. Most of my impressions are based on recorded interviews with Low German speakers as well as the personal notes and observations during those interviews.

My initial impression, as I began my research in Henderson, Nebraska in 1976, was that "Plautdietsch" seemed totally unrelated to any other form of German that I had learned previously. Although my training in standard German had been extensive and my mother had spoken some Low German at home during my earlier years, I was amazed at how little "Plautdietch" I understood in my first exposure to it. I attempted to find correspondences to standard German, proceeding from what I knew to the unknown. However, this effort was relatively unsuccessful, since some of the sounds and the vocabulary bore little or no resemblance to those of standard German. I then attempted to relate it to what I generally knew about my mother's Low German, thinking that the two Low German dialects ought to be similar. This, too, proved to be rather unsuccessful, basically for two reasons: First, I was not as familiar with my mother's Low German as I had previously hoped or believed to be, and therefore, any attempt to build on that experience was not going to be successful. Second, both dialects, although they were Low German, were so different in the sound system and the vocabulary that my mother was not able to understand my tape recordings of "Plautdietsch."

Only after considerable analysis and reading about Mennonite Low German in the United States and Canada did I realize that much of the vocabulary for foods and common household objects was not Low German but loan-words, or words borrowed from various other languages including Russian and English. *Vrenek'e, boklezhan, bulk'e, shisnick, kucheruz,* and *arbuz* are, for example, Russian loanwords for "cheese pockets, tomato, a type of Russian bread, garlic, corn, and watermelon."[1] Other common words such as *blot, glomz, kobel, koda,* and *schaubel* are words borrowed from Polish and mean "mud, cottage cheese, mare, (dish) rag, and bean" respectively.[2] Such vocabulary items as *pinich, vondoaq, olbassem* and *foaken* are also not Low German but Dutch loanwords and apparently peculiar to Mennonite Low German for "diligent, today, currants, and often".[3]

Finally, there were a number of words which sounded like Low German but at the same time bore a striking resemblance to English, e.g., *koa, doa, fens,* and *traekda* for "car, store, fence, and tractor." The speakers themselves were most often unaware that they were using English loanwords until it was pointed out to them. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that these words were given a Low German pronunciation and they sounded perfectly normal for Low German. Furthermore, some of the loanwords had been adopted previously by the parents or grandparents, so that the speakers did not realize that they had been borrowed from English.

The presence of borrowed words for so many high frequency items in "Plautdietsch" can be explained by the migration pattern of the ancestors of the Russian-German Mennonites in Nebraska and Kansas. From the time of the Reformation to the present, they emigrated three times which placed them in contact with many different languages and cultures. From the time of the Reformation to the 18th century they resided in West Prussia but used Dutch as the standard language, and at first, a Dutch dialect and later, the Low German dialect of West Prussia as the colloquial speech. It was in West Prussia that the first important transition occurred from Dutch to German. On the colloquial level the transition from Dutch to Low German seems to have gone rather smoothly, mainly because the Mennonites were surrounded by Low German-speaking neighbors. It was necessary that they learn the local dialect in order to communicate and cooperate with them.

On the standard level, however, the transition was not as smooth. Several attempts were made in the 18th century to introduce standard German into church services, but the more conservative congregations and those in the cities such as Danzig who remained in contact with the Dutch congregations for a longer period of time retained the Dutch language longer.[4] The reluctance to switch to standard German combined with the natural tendency for retaining some vocabulary items from Dutch, at that time a fairly prestigious and important language of the sea, allowed for a small percentage of Dutch words to be taken into German.

The presence of Polish words in "Plautdietsch" is likewise related to the contact between two languages. Until late 18th century West Prussia was under Polish political control, and Polish was the national

language. However, the native Lutherans and Catholics spoke standard German and a Low German dialect, which the Mennonites also adopted. From this contact between the national language and the local vernacular, some of the Polish words were adopted in Low German and have been retained since that time.

The linguistic situation in southern Russia was similar to that of West Prussia. The Mennonites together with the Catholic and Lutheran German-speaking groups formed language islands where German language, culture, and ideas prevailed. Some of the German-speaking groups including Mennonites maintained close ties with the churches and schools in West Prussia, so that the German language and culture were preserved in Russia. At the same time they were permitted almost complete autonomy over their schools, churches, and local government, which was the result of generous terms offered them by Czaress Catherine the Great as an inducement to immigrate to Russia in the first place. Consequently, standard German was the language of the churches and schools while "Plautdietsch" remained the informal speech of the home and small social gatherings. Very few Mennonites learned Russian during the century long sojourn in Russia, although it was the official and dominant language of the country. The Russian words which do occur in "Plautdietsch" are, according to oral tradition, the result of a working relationship between the Mennonite landowners and the Russian peasants, who were employed as domestic servants and day laborers. The latter prepared the meals, drove the coaches and the buggies, and performed other tasks related to agriculture. The foods that they prepared were quite naturally those indigenous to the area, e.g., *vrenek'e, arbuz,* and *boklezhan.* The Mennonites, not having words for these foods in German, adopted the Russian words and gave them a Low German pronunciation. Thus, "Plautdietsch" retained some of the Russian linguistic heritage, which was not preserved in any other form.

When the Russian-German Mennonites arrived in the United States, they initially faced a similar linguistic situation as they had experienced in Russia. Although English was the official and dominant language, "Plautdietsch" and standard German were tolerated as minority languages, as long as there was no political or military threat from the German-speaking countries. After the United States entered World War I against Germany and Austria in 1917, however, the tolerance of German-speaking minorities ended. German-Americans were forced to abandon German in all public places, including churches and schools, as proof that they were indeed patriotic Americans. It was generally believed that no one could speak German and at the same time be patriotic and loyal to the United States. Standard German suffered more than Low German, simply because it functioned as a public language, and ministers and teachers were watched closely for compliance with the law which forbad the use of German in public. "Plautdietsch" was in a somewhat better position, since it was a colloquial form spoken mainly in the privacy of the home and small informal social gatherings. In spite of this, however, there was some pressure on the Russian-German Mennonites to become Americanized and Anglicized, and English was eventually forced upon the speakers of Low German through their children in the schools.

The pronounciation of several vocabulary items was a second factor which contributed to my difficulty in recognizing the correspondences to standard German. I observed, that there was a regular shift of the consonants [k, t, g, n] to [kj, tj, gj, nj]. For example, the word for 'I' was [ekj], for 'pots' was [tja:p], for 'bridge' was [brrgj], and for 'to sing' was [zenj]. I eventually realized that the above differences from standard German were part of a more general linguistic phenomenon known as palatalization of consonants, which is a common feature of German dialects of West and East Prussia. I also noted that not all speakers agreed on the pronunciation of certain selected words. Some pronounced the word for 'I' as [etj] while others preferred [ekj]. For the word 'cows' an additional variation was noted so that some pronounced the word [kji:e] and at least one speaker preferred the pronunciation [tji:e]. I now believe that the latter was an individual variation rather than a dialect variation. The speaker with the [tji:e] pronunciation was most likely substituting the nearest English consonant combination for the more difficult palatalized [kj] sound.

A second impression that I gained after more linguistic field work with other German settlement dialects is that "Plautdietsch" is no ordinary Low German dialect. Generally I have found that speakers of Low German on the Great Plains view their dialects either negatively or with ambivalence. Upon hearing the label "Low German," they are immediately reminded of a lower form of German as opposed to "High German," a more prestigious form. The speakers themselves are often self-conscious or even apologetic about their Low German preferring not to speak it in public or with strangers. Although one could argue that this response is due to the anti-German sentiment of World War I, I personally believe that it is more a matter of the speakers responding negatively to their own speech.

Anyone who has in any way been associated with "Plautdietsch" realizes that the above notion of Low German does not apply to Mennonite Low German. The speakers may on occasion, if asked about the linguistic roots of "Plautdietsch," confuse it with Dutch since their ethnic heritage can be traced to sixteenth century Holland, and they realize from their foreign experiences that Dutch and "Plautdietsch" are similar in pronunciation and vocabulary. In actual fact "Plautdietsch" has its roots in the Danzig area of West Prussia and what is today Poland. Aside from this factual inaccuracy, however, there is no mistaking how positive most speakers feel about their "Plautdietsch." If asked about their associations with "Plautdietsch," they would probably name some of the delicious ethnic foods, recite a joke or humorous anecdote,

or perhaps quote a proverb such as the following: *Waut Haunstje nijh leat, leat Hauns nimmama* "What Johnnie doesn't learn Johnnie will never learn."[5]

In any case, the attitude toward "Plautdietsch" is a good deal more positive than I have seen elsewhere on the Great Plains, even to the point of the speakers showing their pride in their medium. During my visits it also became evident to me that the residents of Henderson, Goessel, Hillsboro, etc., thoroughly enjoy speaking the dialect and that it has served an important social function for over two centuries. Perhaps the best evidence of the high amount of interest in "Plautdietsch" is the attendance at the annual Low German program during the Fall Fest at Bethel College. It is not uncommon to find three to five hundred persons at the Low German play or skit. Of these I would estimate that eighty to ninety percent still understand the Low German, and more than fify percent are still able to use "Plautdietsch" actively.

A third impression about "Plautdietsch" is that compared to most other German settlement dialects on the Great Plains, it is still in relatively good condition and continues to be actively spoken by a large number of speakers. Most persons over sixty years of age are still able to converse with others over quite a wide range of topics while employing only a minimum of English loanwords. Heinz Kloss, a prominent German linguist who has researched the retention efforts of many different German-American groups in the United States, attributes the survival of Mennonite Low German to the quality maintenance efforts which the Russian-German Mennonites put into practice while they were still in Russia.[6] By quality maintenance efforts he meant that the dialect has remained the medium of subtle thinking, lofty ideals, and diversified occupational interests and skills.[7] These efforts were especially important for survival in twentieth century America where there have been rapid changes in values and technology.

One important aspect of language retention is the ability to keep foreign words out of the language. Usually an immigrant language or dialect becomes so infiltrated with English that the natural result is to switch to English. It has been my experience that speakers of "Plautdietsch" make a greater conscious effort to avoid borrowing than other Low German-speaking groups. One particular example of this comes immediately to mind. Several years ago in Henderson, one informant, whom I was about to interview and record, looked at my tape recorder and immediately asked me whether that was my [/nakebpunt]. I was surprised at his question since I did not expect to find a Low German word for such a recent invention. It then occurred to me, however, that this speaker has created a new word for "tape recorder" by combining two existing words from "Plautdietsch." Despite this person's creativity, however, the word never really gained wide acceptance in the community, as far as I was able to determine. Other speakers had difficulty with the meaning of the word even after having heard it several times. In retrospect I suspect that there are at least two reasons for its lack of acceptance: First, "Plautdietsch" like most other nonstandard forms of German lacks a grammatical authority such as a lexicographer who would have sanctioned its usage and given it wider appeal. Second, such authorities depend heavily on a writing system for the communication of ideas, especially new terminology. Since no extensive and widely recognized writing system exists for "Plautdietsch," any attempts at creating new words have been generally unsuccessful.

A fourth impression of "Plautdietsch" has to do with assumptions about language based on nonlinguistic factors. As I began my initial field work with "Plautdietsch," I noted immediately that the speakers had a common ethnic, religious, and linguistic heritage, and I assumed, therefore, that the Low German would also be homogeneous with few variations. Afterall, most of the immigrants had come from the same villages of the Molotschna Colony and many from the same village of Alexanderwohl. In addition, they had immigrated together as a group to the United States and many even settled as a group in the same communities in Kansas and Nebraska. This assumption about the homogeniety of "Plautdietsch" required some modification, however, as I gathered examples from more speakers.

Some of the variations seemed to parallel various church conference affiliations, while others were attributed to groups which were not clearly identified. For the most part the variations that were most apparent to me occurred mainly in the pronunciation of individual words such as "blue" and "gray". Some of the speakers pronounced them as [blau] and [grau], similar to that of standard German, while others pronounced them as [byEIV] and [gvEIV]. Similarly, the words for 'to cook' and 'to make' were pronounced [koka] and [moka] by some and as [koeka] and [moeka] by others. In addition to the group variations, there were individual variations such as [t/i:e] and [kji:e] already mentioned above for "cows" as well as [tu:s] versus [ty:s] for "t home". In some cases the variations produced humorous results, while in others there were long debates about which pronunciation was considered correct. What often seemed to me to be a minor variation, because of my basic assumption of homogeneity within the dialect, turned out to be quite an important variation for the individual groups of speakers.

My final impression concerns the future of "Plautdietsch" and its ability to survive once the older generation of speakers is gone. Despite the past strength of the dialect in Henderson and the communities in south-central Kansas, the prospects of its survival for another generation do not appear to be good. In my estimation too few young people speak the dialect for it to have much chance of survival beyond that point. Many of the speakers remember the 1950s as the decade when one could still attend an annual Christmas program in "Plautdietsch" as well as other activities which promoted the use of the dialect. Although "Plautdietsch" is still occasionally spoken in daily social intercourse in Henderson,

Goessel, and Hillsboro, there has apparently been a marked decrease in the amount of Low German spoken in recent years. In addition, there has been a corresponding increase in the amount of English borrowings because of the emphasis on electronic technology such as the computer.

Although the prognosis for the future is not very positive, there are several measures which can be taken to preserve the existing dialect and perhaps even prolong the life expectancy of "Plautdietsch." First, every effort ought to be made to record on tape oral histories, jokes, proverbs, etc., of persons who still speak Low German. The exact format of the recordings is less important than the fact that they are in Low German. These recordings would preserve these samples of speech for later analysis by folklorists, sociologists, historians, and linguists. In addition to the research function of such recordings, I have found that the interaction with older speakers also serves a useful social function. The majority of the persons interviewed are extremely pleased when they are asked to speak "Plautdietsch" and talk about the past. A precedent for this type of activity has already been set in the form of a Low German and Mennonite German Archive at the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton. Thus far the collection includes cassette recordings, as well as the older reel-to-reel and even wire recordings of the early 1950s.

A second countermeasure would be to establish a center for Low German in the communities where it is still spoken. The center could serve as a type of linguistic museum as well as a place for speakers to meet and speak "Plautdietsch." Various resource materials such as books, dictionaries, and tapes could be made available for interested persons. An alternative proposal would be to offer instruction once again for adults in evening school. I understood that previous attempts to conduct such classes were successful when there were sufficient native speakers available to teach such classes.

A third countermeasure in the preservation of "Plautdietsch" is to stimulate the interest of young people in their linguistic roots. Very little has been written about "Plautdietsch" in the United States in the last fifteen to twenty years. If there is to be any hope for a revival of "Plautdietsch" similar to that of Pennsylvania German after World War I, it will be necessary to provide a link from one generation to the next. Without the interest and skill development of young people, there is little hope for such a renewal.

The entire experience with "Plautdietsch" has also served as an archtypal search for my own linguistic roots which have somehow remained hidden in a haze of uncertainty. I know far less about the specific events and perhaps more importantly, the motivation surrounding the immigration of my forefathers than I do about the Russian-German Mennonites' immigration to the United States. From the folklore concerning the immigration of my mother's ancestors, I know that they probably had at least two things in common with the Mennonites: 1. They spoke a Low German dialect; and, 2. They left Germany for the United States because of the restriction of personal and religious freedom.

In short, my contact with "Plautdietsch" and its speakers has been a far richer and valuable experience than I had ever dreamed possible when I first began my research. It has shown me the importance of being acquainted with our ethnic and linguistic roots when we attempt to discover and define ourselves. In my own situation, the study of the linguistic roots of Russian-German Mennonites has given me a greater appreciation for my own linguistic and ethnic heritage.

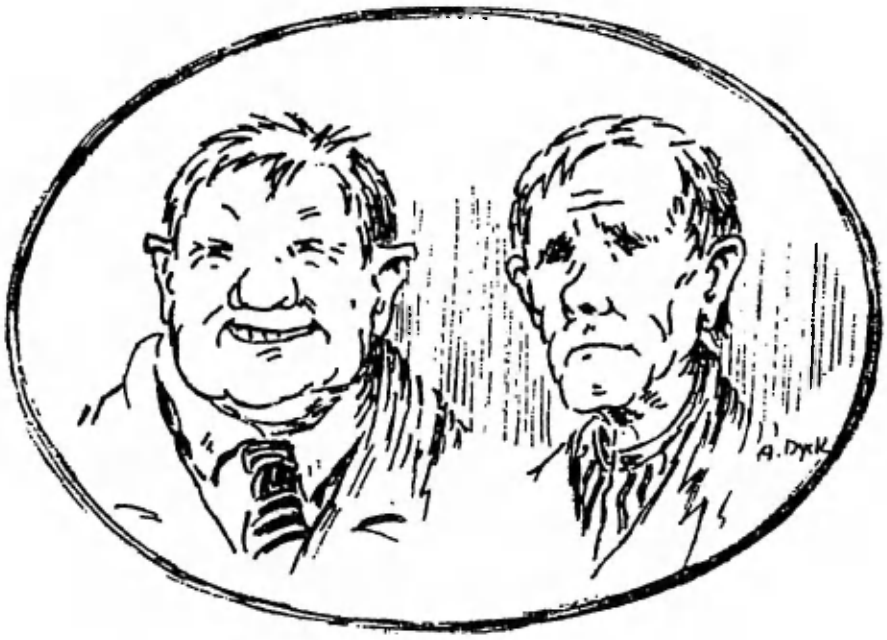


*Illustration from Arnold Dyck's* Koop enn Bua op Reise, 1954.

NOTES

1. John Thiessen, "The Low German of the Canadian Mennonites," *Mennonite Life*, 22, No. 3 (1967), 110. See also Gerhard Wiens, "Russian in Low German." *Mennonite Life*, 13, No. 2 (1958), 75-78.
2. Thiessen, p. 114.
3. Thiessen, p. 111.
4. Jacob A. Duerksen, "Transition from Dutch to German in West Prussia." *Mennonite Life*, 22, No. 3 (1967)), 107-109.
5. Warren Kliewer, "Low German Proverbs," *Mennonite Life*, 15, No. 2 (1960), 78.
6. Heinz Kloss, "German-American Language Maintenance Efforts," in *Language Loyalty in the United States*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1966), p. 209.
7. Kloss, p. 209.

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# Book Reviews

Theron F. Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel; Mission and the Mennonite Church,* 1863-1944. Scottdale, Herald Press, 1980 (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History No. 21).

The boards and staff of the Mennonite Board of Missions (Elkhart), sensing the need for an institutional history, invited American historian Theron Schlabach of Goshen College to make free use of their archives, and to draw upon the memories of their veterans before it was too late, in order to assess the meaning of three quarters of a century of the life of their agency. Not content to gather a simple chronicle of names and places, Schlabach chose the challenge of an issue-oriented analysis, making his work far more interesting and also more difficult to review. His work is both a story with a simply objective data base, well anchored in the archives, and a partisan testimony expressed in a provocative title. The reader may choose which of the gospels is which in that title; it is clear that for the author there is more than one gospel, that they stood in some tension, and that what was being communicated by Mennonite missionary personnel was not always the one he most respects.

Four different models of what the Christian message really is orient Schlabach's account. The beginning is the cultural solidity of the life and piety of Mennonite family churches in mid-America before the Civil War. Mostly still German speaking, almost entirely rural, this Christian culture exemplified especially the virtues of solidarity and humility. The rootage of this experience in the Bible and the Martyr's Mirror: i.e. in the still lively memories of the age of persecution and migration, was sufficient to maintain a high level of clarity about identity. They and others knew who they were. The foundational description of this culture is offered by Schlabach's "Mennonite Revivalism, Modernity—1683-1850" in *Church History* 48 No. 4 (December, 1979) 398-415.

The encounter with America brought these rural Mennonites in touch with a variety of beckoning options. We may imagine it after the image of the letter T: upon moving vertically from the base in the immigrant Mennonite culture they encounter the crossbar, namely American Protestantism after 1860. To the right there is revivalism: a new incarnation of the pietism with which European Mennonitism had maintained a delicate interface for centuries. In America, however, since there is no established church for it to revitalize and accept at the same time, the effect of that search for ever greater authenticity and faithfulness was to be an increasing proliferation of new churches and non-church agencies, as well as the crystalization two generations later of the new doctrinal rigor of fundamentalism. On the left arm of the crossbar there is mainline Christianity. It is like the established churches which Mennonites had known in Europe, in being culturally and numerically dominant, but having no link to the state, it is a free church like the Mennonites in some other ways. In most cases (the dominant denominations being Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist) its worship was not liturgical and its preaching was evangelical. Its leaders being more educated, and its agencies being large, it could afford to be more tolerant, even cooperative. This is the context in which both ecumenical organizations and theological liberalism were to arise a few generations later. When Mennonites began to relate to the crossbar it was not yet so tightly stretched between fundamentalism on the right and social activism on the left as it was to come to be in the 1920's. It was possible in the age of John Fretz Funk to learn from and lean on both at the same time. That learning is what Harold Bender proposed to call The Great Awakening." In term of message, piety, and the most appreciated hymnology, it was from revivalism that Mennonites borrowed most. This did not keep them from benefiting as well from the example of Sunday schools, journalism, and church schools in which the mainstream Protestantism was stronger.

Schlabach has rightly pointed out that by the use of this term Bender and his predecessors put in an exceptionally favorable light what could also be called dilution or accommodation. (T. Schlabach, "Revelle for *Die Stillen im Lande,* MQR LI/3 July 1977, 213ff.). Schlabach prefers to call it "quickening," meaning by that a non-value-laden word for "acceleration," rather than what the term more usually means.

The crossbar tension determines the way Schlabach tells his story: yet in order to understand his own evaluative perspectives we must yet locate the fourth theological type. Prodded by the tensions along the crossbar, American Mennonites in the 20th century projected the ideal of the "Anabaptist Vision." While claiming to distill the essence of what made 16th century Anabaptism a third way, neither Catholic nor Protestant but something better than both, avoiding the vices of both, this neo-Anabaptist vision was also stated as a third way for the present. Thereby it could claim to be a means of transcending the dilemmas of the mainstream Protestant crossbar. This vision is more communitarian than the individualism of the revivalist, yet more different from the world than Mainline Protestantism. Its nonconformity is a reflection of the distinctiveness of God's own call; its pacifism is not the mere refusal of military service, not an addendum tacked on to majority Protestant piety, but a part of the core of the very gospel.

So the letter T has become a cross. The narrative of Mennonite identity in America can be interpreted by plotting it on the graph thereby produced. The vertical line is stretched from the Amish farm community to the neo-Anabaptist assembly living against the stream of urban America. The temptations are individualism, emotionalism, and fundamentalism to the right; dilution, respectability, and relativism to the left.

It was about time that some historian should try to bring to bear on contemporary Mennonite experience the assistance to be gained by typological interpretation. Otherwise narrative bogs down in the variety of events with no framework to give them sense. The proposal Schlabach makes is fitting and rises authentically out of the story he is telling. The criticisms to which it leads him are proper, although (as I shall indicate) sometimes overdone.

It is, however, a shortcoming of the project that the particular data base chosen to run through the typology does not come from a broader survey of the churches and their culture, but must rather be recounted from the institutional history of a Board of Missions and Charities.

The first shortcoming of this distinctive field is that mission outreach, in any of its normal meanings, is one point at which the normative Mennonite visions mentioned above have not been well defined, and have even less been effectively implemented. Although 16th century Anabaptism was aggressively evangelistic, both locally and in sending people for considerable distances, this was not the case for the culture of brotherhood and humility where Schlabach's story starts. These people had never thought seriously of the possibility that the gospel they knew might be good news for the "English" or "the world." Their fathers centuries hence had accepted ghetto quietism as the price of toleration. This self-understanding of maintenance without outreach had been underlined, reinforced and rationalized further by migration patterns. At the other end of the vertical scale, we cannot claim to know with any experientially confirmed confidence how a neo-Anabaptist church can be missionary. Considerable strides have been made in the last two decades in formulating an ideal type ecclesiology consonant with the neo-Anabaptist vision, whose impact ought logically to be good news to all the nations, and ought actually to attract people of other faiths or (especially) of no faith to the values of kingdom discipleship. Yet as a matter of factual experience, these projections remain largely academic. Where Mennonite church communities are growing they still use the language and the institutions of the evangelical heritage.

Schlabach reads his sources with thorough skill and critical empathy. He is quite right in interpreting the Mennonite experience in the nexus of conflicting styles of acculturation rather than "on its own." He lifts the history from mere chronicle by knowing that these identity struggles are there even when unavowed, and thereby brings a kind of self-aware adulthood into the Mennonite experience in America (as usual in such matters, the Canadian component of the story is underrepresented). He records the substance of serious conflict yet without muckraking.

The task of historical revision is always a gospel imperative. The revision projected in the age of the "recovery of the Anabaptist vision" when standing alone was too much an ideal type, too little a product of induction from the sources, to interpret real-life choices and struggles. We are indebted to Schlabach for a most thorough retelling of as much of the story as the archives will enable, and indebted to his fourfold interpretative framework for providing an Ariadne's thread through the data to make the story live. The limits of the study are those of using specifically a missionary agency as the specimen for that identity review. By the nature of the case it is at the point of transcultural mission that any community, even the Mennonite cultural community has the least identity, even when stated as an ideal. Thus some elements of the Mennonite identity quandary (materialism, Americanisation, unity) are inadequately analyzed, because it is not in the experience of a missionary agency that they become the most evident, and some aspects of the mission agency story (support policies, worker competence, field administration, leadership training) are neglected, because they do not readily lend themselves to being taken as specimens for this question.

Therefore Schlabach is obliged to demonstrate the appropriateness of his "types" by using them on the kind of data for which they are least at home; the records not of a "church-as-a-whole," but of a specialized sending agency.

A sending agency by its very nature cannot be the same thing as the body of the churches whose support it hopes to enjoy. The services it carries out are aimed at other worlds, other cultures, must answer questions home churches have not yet met, and which they often even believe it is their duty to refuse to meet. Missionary personnel, and therefore the agencies supporting them, must therefore adapt and modify their message, especially its cultural shape, in ways which (almost by definition) will seem to the home folks like betrayal.

The sources for tension are now obvious:

a) intrinsic conflict between original solid Mennonite conservatism and the patterns of mission picked up from protestantism;
b) intrinsic conflict between types of protestantism, especially when Mennonite conservatism correlates with fundamentalism and the missionaries with cooperative protestantism;
c) places where any of the above clash with the implications of the nascent neo-anabaptist ideal;
d) places where human frailty and finitude fail to resolve any of the above to the satisfaction of the critics.

It must be at the very least the thankless duty, or at best it may be seen as the prophetic ministry of the sending agency, to serve not only as a bridge but sometimes also as a buffer between the home folks and the cultural creativity and adaptability of the missionaries. There is almost no way for the strong cultural solidity of the home churches (which is more important in Schlabach's definition of baseline Mennonitism than it would be for

revivalists) to express concern for faithfulness than in the form of negative criticisms of the adjustments the professionals in far countries make.

Much of Schlabach's early account is taken up with the maneuverings whereby this service of bridge and buffer was exercised, especially by Sanford Calvin Yoder. The dynamics would have been different if the field of study had been something other than the sending of foreign missionaries. Then there would have been more points of interconnection between the values of the basic culture and the agenda of Americanization.

Yet another limitation besets the analysis by virtue of the fact that the issue of conscription has come to be the prototype of being a community of peacemakers. The neo-anabaptist vision proclaims far more than the refusal of military service, but at least it can not be satisfied with less than that. Thus a test of the faithfulness of missionaries in far countries which is objectively manageable for the state-side observer, is whether and how they make military service an issue for the indigenous young men in their churches. The issue of military service is one point at which the old Mennonite vision and the new one agree, although it has different meaning for the two of them, as issues of non-registration or alternative service have demonstrated. It is thus too easy to measure the success of the missionaries in proclaiming a peace church message by what the church in the first generation, still led by missionaries, did about the challenge of military service, either as a good way to make a living in times of peace (India) or as a patriotic duty (Argentina). Such a focus skews the account by giving to military service a different meaning from what it has in the Anglosaxon world, and by suggesting that the first-generation foreign missionary, who is in the country by grace of a visitor's visa, ought to be or could be responsible for positions taken by the young church on such matters.

The fact that we don't really know what kind of institutional shape a neo-anabaptist church would take, not even in a basic congregational setting, and even less how it would run foreign missions, makes critiquing the churchmanship of Sanford C. Yoder too easy. Needing to serve almost alone as bridge and buffer between overseas staff, on the one hand, and on the other the highly disciplined advocates (sometimes called Lancastrians and sometimes Lancasterians) of a discipline demanding plain coats and institutional separation, Yoder properly (this reader would judge) needed both a degree of institutional discretion (in not spreading on the record all possible discussions of matters of discipline) and a degree of trusting frankness (in sharing at least with one or two or three of his more trusted staff colleagues a picture of how to handle those strains). Schlabach considers the former a duplicity (140) and the latter as a confession of guilt (146). In the absence of any viable models of how better a college president could in his spare time administer a mission board, that moral judgment seems to this reviewer unfair. The historian's task of describing the strains intrinsic in the ministry of overseas sending could have been discharged without such censoriousness. On the one issue, separation in doctrine, garb, and organization, the administration is faulted ("Teaching All Things (I)") for defending the missionaries' freedom against the inappropriate standard-setting from back home. On the other, military service, the reproach ("Teaching All Things (II)") is for failing sufficiently to apply back-home standards.

One point where the prior critical commitment leads to a specifically unfair judgment will have to suffice. Missionary personnel were active on committee levels in cooperative projects among the protestant missions and churches in India. They were more cooperative there than their counterparts in the home churches were at the same time. They reported that their involvement in such matters as clearing house committees for information regarding educational policies or literature was not "organic." Schlabach accuses them of duplicity because these relationships certainly were organized, and without further ado he equates "organic" with any and all organization (140). Wider reading in the missionary literature of the time would have made it clear that "organic" was a distinctive term peculiar to the aggressive unity advocacy of E. Stanley Jones, expressing in biblical body language a vision for unity not concentrated on centralized or hierarchial structure yet ceasing to disobey the biblical call to be one body. Jones and his fellows were not precise about how the "organic" unity they called for would be both less and more than organizational unity, but it is abundantly clear that the kind of loose coordination of specialized institutional interests in which the small Mennonite missionary staff in central India did their share of the chores was nothing like the Jones vision. When saying that their cooperation with other mission agencies (not yet with churches) had nothing to do with organic union, the old Mennonite missionaries were telling the pure truth in the commonly understood language of the time. "Organic unity" would have involved at least some formal mutual recognition of church bodies by each other, some kind of intercommunion and exchange of ministries, some kind of policy-making clearance, some kind of economic solidarity. The cooperative committee structures in which a few senior Mennonite missionaries in India shared involved nothing of all of this.

The more ambitiously one projects the future vision of a consistently pacifist gospel, and the more respectfully one reconstructs the power of the pre-modern Mennonite culture of humility, the more tenuous appears the thin strand of common definition linking the two. There is little left but an ethnic/linguistic identity to give "being Mennonite" a place to stand in the present which stretches from the impact of Moody to that of the "Anabaptist Vision."

A more gentle critique would suggest that when the non-missionary survival culture of *Gelassenheit* was no longer sufficient to keep Mennonite churches going alone in an increasingly tolerant, increasingly evangelical environment, and the message of radical discipleship was not yet born, it would have been

natural to appropriate and incorporate, not as betrayal or dissolution, but as a part of Christian obedience, those elements of missionary evangelicalism the most compatible with Mennonite identity and the least representative of the vices of established Christendom. This would have been the moderate missionary method of revival evangelicalism (distinguished from fundamentalism) and the modest social witness of the "social gospel" (distinguished from modernism). That is just about what the early missionaries did.

For one other limit in the structure of this approach Schlabach cannot be faulted. It is not the historian's task: yet it is a part of our challenge. Whether in the tension between the older and the newer normative Mennonite identity, or in the other tension between the right and the left in American protestantism, the question always arises as to what higher criterion one could ultimately appeal to to move beyond the more tense balancing of polar opposites. Even more is it the case when the two tensions are superimposed cross-wise on each other. The Christian claim is that our variations are subject to adjudication from an appeal to the canon of Scripture as read in the face of contemporary challenges and in the power of the Spirit. Schlabach does not attempt that adjudication. As historian he could not, yet as Mennonite lay theologian he must. It is another of the shortcomings of the limitation of his study to mission boards (correlated with the fact that mission boards have been less clear about what they are doing in theological education and articulation than they might have been) that it seemed natural to leave out of the picture the question of how Mennonites read the Bible, and the narrower but more promising discussion of how the reading of the Bible by Mennonites has been changed by a wealth of ecumenical learning, first of all from the Biblical Seminary in New York, and more recently (but more vaguely) from the impact of historical-critical scripture scholarship, as well as by feedback from the transcultural mission experience itself. If there is to be an answer to the identity question for Mennonites from now on, I suggest it will come not from finding a new balance point for the teeter totter between fundamentalism, which puts the bible on a pedestal but does not read it carefully, and mainstream protestantism, with its relativizing of the particular canon, nor a new balance point between old and new sectarian images, but must rather come through the discovery of a renewed quality of dialog with the canonical text as if it mattered powerfully. If it is the case that there is a missionary vision of the peace church that will be more adequate than that of the American fundamentalism, that will have to be confirmed on the ground of scripture study: it will not be credible simply because we historians say it is the most appropriate extrapolation from the inner integrity of the Mennonite frontier experience, or because we peaceniks want our agenda to remain central. Mennonite identity will only be worthy of doing missions with if and as the reason we are about it is no longer a concern to be denominationally worthy of our own respect but rather a renewal of the same yieldedness before Scripture which was where it all began.

One specifically Mennonite vice is common to the bottom and the top ends of the cross, namely the insistence that we must do everything just right, as if it would be better not to do something at all than to do it fallibly. The gospel of the protestant missionary world, i.e the gospel as formulated on the cross bar, with the call to personal repentance for the individual and the building of schools and hospitals for India, was the only gospel there was then: i.e. the only formulation of the missionary message which was ready to operate. It is not clear from Schlabach's choice of a provocative title whether he would rather that it had not been done than have it done so inadequately. Does his projection of the more adequately anabaptist "Gospel," which would have been preferable but did not exist, point to a practical affirmation of praise for all that still did get done, even for the times where what really did happen was more anabaptist than the models the missionaries were consciously following? Or would it have been better to do less when we could not do it better? There are places in the more narrative and less critical sections of the text which assure me that the former is his preference. Those readers who have been most critical of the book seem to have caught rather the other implication.

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Sanford G. Shetler, *Preacher of the People: A Biography of S. G. Shetler* (1871-1942). Scottdale: Herald Press, 1982, 286 pp.

Urie A. Bender, *Four Earthen Vessels: Biographical Profiles of Oscar Burkholder, Samuel F. Coffman, Clayton F. Derstine, and Jesse B. Martin*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1982, 315 pp.

Biography continues to be an effective and popular way to read Mennonite history. In spite of their emphasis on brotherhood, Mennonites and related groups have a certain fascination for strong leaders, perhaps in part because such leaders often both model the ideals of the group and reflect the cherished background from which the group comes.

Sanford G. Shetler tells the story of his father, S. G. Shetler, in *Preacher of the People*. The elder Shetler was born into an Amish home in western Pennsylvania, became a Mennonite and a successful schoolteacher and was ordained first as a minister (1897) and then as a bishop (1915) in what is now the Mennonite Church. He gained his reputation in Mennonite circles as a widely travelled evangelist, a Bible Conference speaker, a teacher in Bible School terms (beginning at Goshen in 1904), and a leader in Young People's Institutes. He served on several church-wide boards and committees, including the Publication Committee.

In describing his father's activities, the author provides interesting and helpful insights into Mennonite life in the years of what has been called the "Great Awakening." His pictures of his father as a man of

action, as warmly evangelical, as one whose faith was "marked with an unequivocal acceptance of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God" (p. 235), as a preacher of the people with little in common with "showy intellectualism," and as a supporter of conservative views, are also pictures of much of the Mennonite world of his day. It was a world which he also helped to shape.

The book is easily read, although at times the author tells more than is needed (for example, frequent listings of meetings and sermons) and at others not enough. The latter is particularly true concerning his father's weaknesses. These are alluded to but never developed. The author admits, for example, that his father's life was not without mistakes, but hastens to insist that there is "no point in highlighting these mistakes." Such reticence is undoubtedly on the whole an admirable Mennonite virtue, but it is a widespread failure in Mennonite biography. Until Mennonite biographers become willing to explore their subjects in the round, we shall continue to be shortchanged, despite otherwise good writing.

Urie Bender in *Four Earthen Vessels* writes on four men who helped to shape the Mennonite Church in Ontario, Canada, during approximately the same years that S. G. Shetler was active in the United States. The four biographies —on Oscar Burkholder, Samuel F. Coffman, Clayton F. Derstine, and Jesse B. Martin—are tied together by various devices. Most obvious is the author's development of the four leaders' relationship to the Ontario Mennonite Bible School in Kitchener. Each taught in the school for many years, and all but Derstine served as principal. In the second chapter, "Birth of a School," the author provides a short historical background to the founding and development of the institution in which they taught.

Another device tying the biographers together is a similar treatment of each character, under the headings of "early years," "life in the family," "serving the church," and "the man." A third, although more indirect, device is Bender's identification of the fundamentalist orientation of each of his characters, although the author sees their Fundamentalism as being tempered by their Anabaptist-Mennonite background and thus prefers to write instead of their simple biblicism.

Striking parallels exist among the biographees. All four were pastors with long ministries in one congregation—Burkholder at Cressman Church in Breslau, Coffman at Moyer Church in Vineland, Derstine at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, and Martin at Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo. Outside their congregations, all held significant leadership positions in their denomination, to which all gave unstintingly of their time. But this was often done at the expense of family and congregational life; as a result, complaints sometimes came from both home and church members. Financial sacrifices were made, since the leaders were often absent from their regular employment and their congregations seldom gave in support anything close to the needs of their pastor. All four were earthen vessels, not perfect, but willing to be shaped and used by God. Each had a good wife, who kept the family togther during her husband's frequent absences from home, helped to manage the finances, and gave her husband much needed support and encouragement. Read on this level, the biographies, one senses, reflect the lives of many Mennonite pastors, their families, and their congregations in the first half of this century.

In his preface, Bender urges his readers not to consider these four biographies as fully developed, but rather as sketches that are "amalgams of historical fact and impression," an approach which he considers gives a "more rounded picture" of each man. Thus the author eschews a strictly chronological treatment of his characters, and fills his accounts with stories, memories of people, and revealing character traits. This last feature is especially well done; Bender is a master at dropping a word, a phrase, a story that heightens an element of character. There is, for example, Oscar Burkholder, according to his daughter, "forever quoting Scripture as a reason for doing things," S. F. Coffman collecting salt and pepper shakers and wearing broadfall trousers and three-quarter length frock coat (I missed, however, the tuning fork which Coffman used in leading singing, and which fascinated us Brethren in Christ young people when we saw him at our periodic visits to the Selkirk Mennonite Church), C. F. Derstine working on his punching bag in the basement of the parsonage, and J. B. Martin, busy churchman that he was, doing the grocery shopping for the wife whom he adored. This good eye for detail helps to make Bender the superb story teller that he is.

On its own terms, this is such a good book that any criticism of it comes with some bad grace. There are several small errors of fact: for example, Rainham and Selkirk are the same church, not separate ones (pages 140-154); Spurgeon's tabernacle no longer stands, having been destroyed in World War II (p. 286). More significantly, the book devotes virtually as much space to each leader's family background as it does to his church life; but since it is the latter that gives the leader his historical significance, a sense of imbalance seems to prevail in each study. Moreover, the characters of the biographies, once past the point of conversion, generally seem to have a static quality about them; for completely successful biographies, some sense of character development is important. For whatever reasons, this quality seems difficult to achieve in the writing of Mennonite and Mennonite-related biography. Finally, Bender necessarily relies heavily on interviews with people who knew his subjects. Memories, however, are notoriously selective; more documentation from other sources would have strengthened the validity of the interviews.

But these reservations aside, Bender has written a fascinating book, one that on its own level may serve as a model for others. Particularly to be encouraged is his coverage of Mennonite leaders in a collection of biographies. Probably few Mennonites merit book-length attention; many, however, warrant the shorter treatment that Bender models in *Four Earthen Vessels*.

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