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The Relation of Land and Faith in a
Selection of Mennonite Novels

by

Carol Elizabeth Enns Goossen

A Thesis submitted to the University of
Winnipeg/University of Manitoba
Joint Master's Program Committee
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Department of Religion

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THE RELATION OF LAND AND FAITH IN A SELECTION OF
MENNONITE NOVELS

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CAROL ELIZABETH ENNS GOOSSEN

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Relation of Land and Faith

We are human beings shaped in the image of an unimaginable Creator. We learn to know and love this unnamable One in communities extending across time and space. John R. Ruth

Through art we come to discover the sorts of people we are, the problems of our cultures and our communities, the depths of meaning in our common life. Gordon Kaufman

I.

In literature we are provided with portraits of people's lives, both individual and communal. We are invited into the world of the author's creation to experience how life was and is lived, and we are urged to perceive the myriad forces of culture, history, and faith which shape human self-understanding and world view. From our excursions into these other worlds, we can derive meanings about the nature of our own human existence. With these thoughts as my starting point, it is my intention in this thesis to examine a selection of Mennonite fiction for each author's presentation of the Mennonites' faith and religious life. In particular, I

will focus on the relation of land and faith in Mennonite experience.

I have chosen four historical novels written by Mennonites about Mennonite life. The books are organized in chronological sequence according to date of publication. In this order, they form a spectrum of Mennonite life spanning roughly fifty years of Mennonite history.(1)

The first selection, A Russian Dance of Death, by Dietrich Neufeld, is set in Russia in the early 1920's. The book, though not strictly fiction nor a novel, relates the experiences of the Mennonite colonists who, after 120 years of peaceful and prosperous existence, suddenly experience the collapse of their world in the upheaval of the Russian Revolution and the terrorist activities of Nestor Makhno and his bandits.

The story No Strangers in Exile, by Hans Harder, occurs about ten years after the events depicted in A Russian Dance of Death. The novel portrays the lives of a small group of Mennonites who are exiled from their ancestral home in the Volga region to a labor camp in Russia's far north.

In Peace Shall Destroy Many, by Rudy Wiebe, the setting shifts from Russia in the 1920's and 30's to Canada in the early 1940's. This novel focuses on the lives of a small community of Mennonites, the older generation of which has emigrated from Revolution-torn

Russia. The community has, to some extent, re-established a peaceful existence in the bushland of Northern Saskatchewan.

The final selection, The Blue Mountains of China, by Rudy Wiebe is an epic novel detailing the lives of several Mennonite families dating from Pre-Revolution times in Russia to the 1960's in Canada and Paraguay.

Since the Mennonites live by a faith of the Bible - a faith that is reflected in both the style and content of the novels - I have confined my own analysis of the novels to Biblical categories. What this means is that the aim of this thesis is to discover not only how the authors of the selected Mennonite fiction portray the relation of land and faith in Mennonite experience, but also to seek to understand these portrayals in terms of the Biblical experience of land and faith.

As an aid to defining and understanding land motifs in the Bible, I rely on Walter Brueggemann's, The Land. In this book, Brueggemann suggests that land is the central theme in the story of the Bible, and so focuses his Biblical interpretations particularly on the relation of land and faith.(2) For this reason The Land is an especially relevant text for the interpretive intention of this thesis.

It must be noted that aspects of Brueggemann's Biblical interpretation may be considered

somewhat unorthodox. As we shall later discover, his conclusions regarding the New Testament are particularly innovative. In order to place his perspective in context, it is helpful to understand Brueggemann's own attitude toward his research. He explains:

I have in each turn of the history of people [Israel] and land tried to focus on particular texts [Biblical] and explore how these might permit a different reading of the whole of Israel's history. . . . It is my hope that this study may hint at the categories of perception which will permit us to see the text differently and also permit us to discern ourselves and our history differently. . . . The following discussion is offered in conviction that the Bible provides us with peculiar and decisively important categories for facing the crises of the human spirit. I am aware that my conclusions on the relation of the Old and New Testaments are innovative. . . . I hope there is a legitimate suggestion of fresh ways in which the intent of the text might be discerned. (3)

Generally, Brueggemann's work has been well received by the academic community.(4) Thus, it is legitimate to regard The Land as Brueggemann intends; that is, as one among many valid contributions to the ongoing research of Biblical scholarship.(5) It is also important to recognize that it is not my intention to prove or disprove Brueggemann's claims, nor is it to develop a comprehensive Biblical theology of the land. Rather, my intention is to accept Brueggemann's perspective as a prism through which I am able to perceive and illuminate the spectrum of Mennonite experiences of land and faith as they exist in the fictional works.

For this thesis, the particular relevance

of Brueggemann's perspective in The Land lies in his categorical division of the Old Testament story of the land and its inhabitants. For as we shall see, the movements of the people of Israel in and out of the land are in many ways analagous to the stories of the Mennonites upon which this thesis will focus. Thus, more specifically, Brueggemann's text will be used as a point of reference or paradigm for defining terms and identifying Biblical analogy in the Mennonite novels.

In order to clarify the focus of this thesis, the following two sections discuss several key concepts which, together, form the foundation for discussions in later chapters. First, I will define how the term "land" is used in our study of the novels. Second, in order to understand the role of Brueggemann's interpretation of the Old Testament in subsequent chapters of this thesis, I include a brief outline of The Land. Finally, as an aid to understanding the relation of land and faith in the Mennonite novels, a brief historical sketch of the development of the Mennonites' own relation to the land is provided.

II.

The following analysis of the relation of land and faith involves a dual understanding of the term "land." Land refers to actual soil and landscape, but also includes the concept of land as "place". Land is

made place by its inhabitants.

Mircea Eliade's description of how humans create a "place" out of "space" is a helpful introduction to this idea. Eliade explains this phenomenon by distinguishing the two terms cosmos and chaos. Generally, the terms delimit a society's "inhabited territory [cosmos] and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it [chaos]." (6) He comments further:

To settle in a territory . . . is undertaking the creation of the world one has chosen to inhabit. . . Establishment in a particular place, organizing it, inhabiting it, are acts that presuppose an existential choice - the choice of the universe that one is prepared to assume by creating it. (7)

According to Eliade, inhabiting a land involves the act of creating a world, the basis of which is a particular structure of meaning. People create a cosmos by infusing a territory with meaning. Moreover, Eliade ascertains that space is infused with meaning through an act of consecrating the turf. (8) People create a world by making their space "the center of the universe"; the center being the place where communication exists between heaven and earth. Existence is made real or meaningful by the presence of God in the land. By extension, the world outside of consecrated space is regarded as a formless chaos or space.

In his text, The Land, Brueggemann generally affirms Eliade's distinction between place and space regarding the land. "Place" is distinguished from "space" by the addition of meaningfulness in human

life.(9) But Brueggemann adds another dimension to Eliade's idea of meaning through consecration of turf. He writes: "There are no meanings apart from roots."(10) Thus for Brueggemann, humans derive meaning not only from the presence of God in the land, but also from the abiding nature of His presence through history:

Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny.(11)

So, for Brueggemann, land as place is land where humans find meaning in life not only by the experience of God's presence in the land, but also from the communal memories of God's presence in the land through history. In this way, the land itself takes on special meaning for its inhabitants: " Land is . . . always the bearer of overpluses of meaning known only to those who lose and yearn for it."(12)

This notion of land as place (versus space) is, for Brueggemann, the essence of the Old Testament experience of land:

The land which Israel yearns and which it remembers is never unclaimed space but is always a place with Yahweh, a place well filled with memories of life with him and promise from him and vows to him.(13)

Brueggemann suggests that, for the people of Israel, faith is always connected to the land and centers his analysis on this aspect of Israel's history. As a result, the distinction between land as space or place

underlies Brueggemann's entire interpretation of the Old Testament experience of land and faith.

Brueggemann organizes the history of Israel into three separate histories, each determined by the people's status in relation to the land: 1) Egypt to Canaan, the history beginning with the promise of land and ending with Israel's arrival at their promised land; 2) Canaan to Babylon, the history of managing the land ending in exile; 3) Exile to Jerusalem, the new history of promise which begins in exile and culminates in kingdom. Around these three histories, Brueggeman builds the thesis that, by his word, God gives the land as gift. As such, the land always remains in God's possession. Land, therefore, must be held in covenant. We are responsible for its care according to God's word.

By expanding on this premise, Brueggemann observes in the Biblical story a dialectic regarding care for the land. Those who neglect God's ownership--who grasp the land and presume ownership of land--lose it; while those who risk having no land receive the gift of land.

The term "land," in this context, implies the dual meaning discussed above; namely, as both place and turf. For Israel, land meant not only a chunk of soil, but a place characterized by the presence of Yahweh, "social coherence and personal ease in prosperity, security and freedom." (14) So not only land, but also place in the land, are God's gift and subject to the

dialectic of gift and grasp: ". . . grasping for home leads to homelessness and risking homelessness yields the gift of home."(15)

Drawing on the above mentioned observations, Brueggemann perceives the history of Isarel as a series of histories based on the Israelites' situation in the land. During each history, the Israelites live a particular relation to the land which shapes their relation to Yahweh. At the end of each history, life as it had been known comes to an end. With new history, the people experience a new situation in the land which, in turn, affects their faith. And this is so for Israel precisely because the land is not simply turf, but place.

Subsequently, Brueggemann defines the three histories of Israel in terms of the people's landedness and landlessness.(16) Generally speaking, the terms are correlatives of Eliade's cosmos and chaos. Brueggemann describes the status of landedness as a community securely in possession of land and feeling God's sanctioning presence in the comfort and prosperity resulting from such security.(17) The Israelites' history in Canaan is the Old Testament example of landed existence. The danger inherent in such status is the tendency of humans to regard the land as their own, thus forgetting God's word that land is always a gift.

The result of grasping for land is loss of land. Brueggemann defines landlessness as the condition

of being displaced: ". . . alienated from the place which gave security and identity. . . . alienated from all the shapes and forms which gave power to faith and life."(18) The two examples of landlessness in Israel's history are their forty-year wandering in the Sinai desert and their exile from Canaan into Babylon. In the context of these examples, the meaning of landlessness becomes closely aligned with the Biblical motif of wilderness. That is, to be landless is to be cast into the wilderness.

G. H. Williams comments that although the Hebraic words for wilderness in the Old Testament are numerous, they all translate into the same basic meaning: ". . . the wilderness was the Unsown as distinguished from the Sown (land)."(19) These two terms fall directly in line with the chaos/landless, cosmos/landed distinctions of Eliade and Brueggemann. For the Israelites, unsown land was synonymous with desert, disorder, darkness, and death; while sown land referred to the created order of gardens, orchards, and pastures.(20)

The distinction between wilderness land and paradise land is perhaps most clearly expressed in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. The garden of Eden symbolizes the paradise in which God's presence is known, and security and prosperity are certain. The world of Adam and Eve exemplifies perfect landedness. In contrast, when the couple is cast out of the garden, they suffer displacement and alienation from God. Consequently, the wilderness is perceived as wasteland.

If we were to extend the symbolism in the story of Eden to the Old Testament distinction between sown and unsown land, it can be seen that the created order of human settlement is, in fact, a re-created Eden, bearing the same connotations of security and the presence of God (landedness). Likewise, unsown land is wilderness wasteland characterized by insecurity and alienation (landlessness).

What all these terms express is the concept that reality or meaning in human life is derived from having a place in the land and living a landed existence. The factors that transform space into place--community, history, and the experience of God's presence--are also the factors that form meaning and provide humans with a sense of security and identity in life. Hence, to be landless is to be severed from all of these reality-shaping structures.

Paul Tournier, in his book A Place For You, suggests that all humans essentially quest for place in the land. The yearning is often defined as a "paradise lost" syndrome or nostalgia for a world of perfection.(21) We desire a place of security, a place with God, a place as perfect as the lost world of Eden.

In short, the meaning of land as place refers to the idea of inhabited land as a world created and divinely sanctioned. It involves the nature of community, part of which is their experience of God in the land. Land as place, therefore, is integral to any

treatment of the relation of land and faith. The concept points to the significance of the interaction of land and people in shaping faith. Faith is affected by one's feeling of having or not having a place in the land. Landed community--life in the garden--provides structures that support faith. On the contrary, to be landless--adrift in the wilderness--is to be in a place where feelings of alienation cause such insecurity and doubt that faith is threatened.

We must not, however, be misled by the categorical distinction between landed and landless existence. For as will later become evident, to live a landed existence does not guarantee a strong and perfect faith. The very security and prosperity designed to support faith can lead to a callous neglect of God's Word. Likewise, life in the wilderness does not automatically imply the demise of faith. For example, during the Israelites' years of wandering in the desert, there were indeed people who succumbed to doubt and lost faith in God's promise of land. But there were also people who never relinquished faith in God's abiding and sustaining presence. These faithful people regarded the wilderness as the place where God's voice was heard most clearly and the covenant bond most secure. Hosea, for one, writes of Israel's relation to God during their time in the desert using the intimate imagery of a bride and her bridegroom.(22) Later, the prophets and early saints of the church write of the wilderness as a place of refuge to

which one might escape from the world and experience mystical union with God.(23) So there is both a positive and a negative understanding of wilderness in the Biblical story and in Christian tradition.(24) The conditions of landed and landless existence, therefore, must not be regarded as having singular and preordained repercussions on faith. Rather, these states of existence must be understood in the context of Brueggemann's dialectic. Grasping for land results in landlessness and risking landlessness yields the gift of land.

III.

In addition to the Old Testament landed/landless paradigm regarding the relation of land and faith, the selected novels also reveal a relation between land and faith that is peculiar to the Mennonite people. As the history of the Mennonites unfolded, these people developed their own particular bond to the land, which directly relates to the understanding of wilderness as a place of refuge. A brief historical sketch will highlight this dimension of the relation of land and faith for the Mennonite people.

The Anabaptist movement, out of which the Mennonites evolved, began in the urban centers of Germany, Holland, and Switzerland during the sixteenth century Reformation.(25) Its founding members are described as having "no proletarian common denominator. . . . the movement was heterogeneous in character with adherents

from all social classes and vocations."(26) As the movement sought ways to sustain itself, however, it became increasingly linked to an agrarian lifestyle.(27) By the time Mennonites began to emigrate to Canada in the late nineteenth century, agriculture was an integral part of the Mennonite way of life.(28)

The Anabaptist/Mennonite transition from a heterogeneous group, which included urban professionals, to a society of rural agriculturalists was encouraged and shaped by several forces in history. A brief overview of these forces will identify the major factors contributing to this change. It is important to note that all of these influences are presented as distinct for the sake of simplicity and clarity. Just as the movement of history is known to gyrate, these factors overlap, interconnect, and repeat over the course of time.

The most direct force that propelled Anabaptists into rural areas was oppression. The first Anabaptists suffered violent persecution from both Catholics and Protestants, and from civic and ecclesiastical parties.(29) Between 1525 and 1560, thousands of Anabaptists were imprisoned, tortured, and martyred. The struggle to simply stay alive kept Anabaptists on a migratory path, and moving increasingly into rural areas where they were less conspicuous to their persecutors.(30)

Secondly, the Anabaptists themselves were committed to separating from the rest of the world.(31)

The foundation of this commitment rested in a dualistic world view, often now referred to as a two kingdom theology. A brief overview of this theology will help to explain the Anabaptists' desire to live in rural areas. Early Anabaptists applied the New Testament distinction between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness to their own existential situation.(32) The kingdom of Christ was not perceived as a sometime future event; rather, Christ's return was anticipated to be imminent. To prepare for this event, true followers of Christ must begin the work of initiating the holy kingdom on earth, here and now: "The Anabaptists believed they were the forerunners of a time to come, in which the Lord would establish His people and His laws throughout the earth."(33) The world was regarded as the kingdom of darkness and sin which must be cast away, both spiritually and geographically, for purity of faith to exist.

Article 4 of the Schleithem Confession of 1527, one of the earliest statements of Anabaptist conviction, details this two kingdom Weltanschauung:

For truly all creatures are in but two classes, good and bad, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who have come out of the world. . . . everything which is not united with our God and Christ cannot be other than abomination which we shun and flee from. By this is meant all popish and anti-popish works and church services, meetings and church attendance, drinking houses, civic affairs, the commitments made in unbelief and other things of that kind, which are highly regarded by the world and yet are carried on in flat contradiction to the command of God, in accordance with all the unrighteousness which is in the world. From all these things we shall be separated and have no part with them for they are

nothing but an abomination . . . (34)

The religious practices and underlying precepts of the Anabaptist religion reflect this basic two kingdom theology. An outline of their main tenets of faith reveals a concern to maintain a community representative of God's kingdom over against the larger fallen world:(35)

1) Believer's Baptism--baptism based on knowledge and confession, and involving a genuine rebirth out of the state of sin

2) Discipleship as "Nachfolge Christi"--following Christ in complete obedience, which includes maintaining an ethic of love and non-resistance

3) Use of the Ban--excommunicating those people of the fellowship who act in disobedience

4) Church as Gemeinde--". . . the living together in peace and mutual exhortation, or the sharing of both material and spiritual things"(36)

5) The Suffering Church--"Conflict with the world was inevitable for those who endeavored to live an earnest Christian life."(37)

Menno Simons summarizes the credo of the Mennonites in these words: "The entire evangelical Scriptures, teach us that the church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life, and worship, a people separated from the world."(38)

Because of the Mennonites' conviction to separate from the world, the rural setting was an appropriate location for them to live. As a natural isolator, rural areas served to protect the people from their persecutors, while also serving as a practical location for living out their commitment to avoid the sins

of the world.

The Mennonites were further encouraged into rural areas by the influence of the earlier born Waldensian sect.(39) The Waldensians, drawing on Revelation 12:6, maintained that the true church of Christ must withdraw from the world into the wilderness. Through the influence of this group, the idea of wilderness as a place of refuge made further inroads into Mennonite thinking. The effect is understandable, as the Waldensians' proclamation only supported the Mennonites' own belief in separation. The idea that the true church must locate in the wilderness also intensified the link between Mennonite faith and land. The wilderness was God's sanctioned place for his followers; and the most practical way to survive in wilderness areas was to farm. Thus, more and more Mennonites adopted an agricultural lifestyle.

By the late eighteenth century, when Mennonites began migrating to Russia, working the land had already become a tradition; and it was a tradition that influenced their faith:(40)

The Mennonites brought to their new Russian environment a brotherhood-type of church, but not a brotherhood in the creative evangelical sixteenth century sense. It was a quietistic, non-missionary Mennonitism which sought to preserve an historic faith by formalistic, tradition-honoured means. The Mennonites brought to Russia, also, a faith which had acquired certain cultural accretions which in turn had been absolutized and sanctified.(41)

As we shall see, one of those "cultural accretions" was working the land.

The period of history that the Mennonites lived in Russia seemed to solidify the bond between Mennonites and an agrarian lifestyle. During this 130-year period, the Mennonites lived without external strife, and achieved monumental success as agriculturalists. At their peak in 1920, the Mennonite population stood at 120,000 with land holdings amounting to more than 3,000,000 acres.(42) In addition to agricultural prosperity, two other developments occurred during these years that strengthened the bond between Mennonite faith and the land.

One, they developed as a cultural and ethnic group to the extent that they considered themselves to be a distinct people. There are several reasons for this occurrence.(43) First of all, the Mennonites already carried within them feelings of segregation when they arrived in Russia. The governments of their previous homelands had never fully accepted them as citizens. As a result, the Mennonites already understood themselves to be a distinct group. Second, the long distance from their parent churches, combined with the "insulated" environment of the new homeland, further reinforced feelings of peoplehood. Third, the privilege of freedom to govern themselves and to establish their own economic, social, welfare, and educational institutions served to create a "state within a state." Such factors naturally intensified their already existing emotions of detachment. Lastly, the Russian government itself perpetrated this

state of affairs by treating the Mennonites as a group distinctly different from all other colonists who were settled in Russia at that time. Thus: "As a church and as a social, economic, and political entity . . . [the Mennonites in Russia] also assumed the attributes of an ethnic subgroup, or people, and also invariably spoke of itself as *das mennonitische volk*."(44)

One cannot help but call to mind here the two kingdom theology so central to previous generations of Anabaptists and Mennonites.(45) In consideration of this element of Mennonite faith, the social and political factors contributing to the development of a "mennonitisches Volk" lose their incidental quality. The religious/theological goal of the Mennonite people was to develop a community "in the world but not of the world."(46) Religiously, the formation of the community of Mennonites in Russia represents the fulfillment of the two kingdom theology to an extraordinary extent.

The second development during the "Golden Age" in Russia that intensified the bond between Mennonite faith and the land was the integration of religious values into all other affairs of life:

The first settlers to Russia brought with them the machinery for ethnic survival and applied it instinctively to the new setting. . . . group survival depended . . . on a definite cultural identity and a strong social system. Both these dimensions found expression in institutionalized religion. . . . religious values . . . set the boundaries of major institutions and defined the basis of interaction within the community. . . . ecclesiastical and civil interests tended to merge.(47)

With freedom to govern their own civil, economic, social, welfare, and educational institutions, in a closed environment almost exclusively Mennonite, religious values became an institutionalized factor in community affairs, influencing both ecclesiastical and civil decision-making. For example, church and civil authorities often acted together to protect each other's interests. (48)

Mennonite culture also developed integrated with religion and agriculture:

. . . Mennonite culture was the Mennonite way of life, firmly rooted in Biblical religion, holistic in its theology, with a seven-day-a-week life-embracing ethic that called for a separation from the state and from the larger society. It centered in the family and in the congregational community, both of which were viewed as images of the kingdom of God; both present and coming.

Culture also meant or had come to mean, particular styles in which the Mennonite way of life appeared and without which it could not exist. Thus for some Mennonites, culture above all meant agriculture and land-based communities. (49)

Thus, the commingling of religious values, civic affairs, and culture only deepened the bond between Mennonites, agriculture and the land. Correct worship was maintained by isolation which was maintained by farming.

This development in Mennonite life extended even to the personal level:

The Mennonite pioneer believed in his land in the same direct way that he believed in God. Working it was a sacred trust. He gave it his lifelong devotion and unceasing toil and through his commitment to God's bountiful gift he found his meaning here on earth. (50)

Very simply, a Mennonite lived his faith by working the land.

In conclusion, one result of the integration of religious values with all other dimensions of Mennonite life was that land became an essential factor in the maintenance of Mennonite religious tradition. Mennonite Christianity required a plot of earth to maintain the truth of its faith. Land embodied the possibility of freedom - freedom to worship God in traditional Mennonite ways.

A second result was that the land itself became sacred. Recalling the notion of Eliade's that space is made place through an act of consecration, the Mennonites' desire to live separated from the rest of the world only intensified the sacred land/profane land distinction. In this context, the Mennonites' land holdings delimited the holy enclave they had created in the otherwise fallen world. Thus, the land itself held religious significance for Mennonite people.

A third result was that religion remained the focal point of life.(51) However, although religion continued to predominate in the Mennonite colonies of Russia, the structural interweaving of religious values with civic and other community organizations eventually had a negative impact on the faith of the Mennonites: "In the Mennonite commonwealth religious tradition and practices became communal rather than private values . . . symbolic of the difference between the Mennonite community and the outside social order of which the state was a part."(52) Consequently, there was never any demand that

religious values become a matter of individual conscience. The years of peace and relative stability, likewise, allowed that religious principles never be challenged or questioned. Rather, they served as a part of the total structure that promoted and sustained ethnic exclusivity. As we shall see in chapter two, the lack of individual commitment to faith eventually fostered a religious apathy among some Mennonites that allowed them to become preoccupied with the land to the neglect of their original principles of faith.

In 1917, the Golden Age of the Mennonites in Russia came to an end. War and the great Russian Revolution once again brought destruction and persecution to Mennonite communities.(53) Under tragic and horror-filled circumstances, thousands of Mennonites left their "Heimat" for Canada, United States, and South America. However, although they left their homeland, they did not leave behind their love and need for land. Of the Mennonites emigrating to Canada, Frank Epp writes:

The availability of an abundance of land, preferably in parcels sufficiently large and compact to allow formation of strong agricultural communities, was probably the most essential external condition for Mennonite continuity and the preservation of everything important to them.(54)

It could be conjectured that Mennonite immigrants were merely attempting to transplant the successful lifestyle of Russia to North America, but it is more than that. The Mennonites were concerned to preserve their faith; and traditional faith could be maintained

only by reconstructing the entire structure of society as it had developed in Russia.(55) Thus, land continued to be essential to the maintenance of correct worship.

To recapitulate, there are four basic factors that contributed to the Mennonites' evolution from a mixed urban group to a conformed rural society:

- 1) The struggle to maintain life and avoid persecution
- 2) The religious conviction to separate from the world's evil, based on a two kingdom theology
- 3) The intermingling of religious values with all other affairs of life, both personal and communal
- 4) The concern to maintain faith in a new country

Kauffman and Harder, in their book Anabaptists Four Centuries Later, explain the transition: "The traditional perspective has fostered the 'rural life hypothesis' that community agrarianism is an integral part of Mennonite faith and life because it reinforces the central doctrines of nonconformity to the world and non-resistance to inevitable persecution in the world."(56) So rural life, like the maintenance of German language, served as a daily reminder to the Mennonites of their religious conviction regarding the larger world. But, as we have seen, rural life not only reinforced these central doctrines; they became ideologically dependent on it.

The entire history of the Mennonites can

be seen as the story of a people in search of a homeland. From Europe to Poland and Prussia, to Russia, to China, and to North and South America the Mennonites have wandered in the hope of finding land they could call home. Their search has always led them into more and more isolated regions and is ongoing even today.(57) Over the last decade in Canada, only the Mennonites continue to pioneer wilderness lands.(58) Through these vicissitudes of history, the wilderness has come to represent a place of promise--an empty chaos that the Mennonites could settle and transform into paradise, and so take refuge from the world.

This practice of forging into the wilderness is also an expression of the paradise lost syndrome. Ever since the Mennonites lost the golden world they had known in Russia, they have wandered the globe in search of a place where feelings of landedness could be re-rooted. It is essentially a longing for Eden, which for many Mennonites was the world they had known in Russia.

IV.

The works to be examined in this study, all focus on some aspect of the Mennonites' wanderings from the time of the Russian Revolution onward. Harry Loewen suggests that much of Russian-Mennonite literature since that time is largely an expression of paradise

lost.(59) The older generation of writers, who experienced the collapse in Russia, focus on the loss of the physical world, while younger generations of writers express the loss more in the form of remembering.(60) Loewen concludes: "The land or home motif, whether understood in the physical-geographical-historical sense or in the spiritual-symbolic sense, runs like a red thread through most of Canadian-Mennonite prose and poetry."(61) So, we can see in Mennonite literature the drama of the people's historical-religious tie to the land, along with their longing for place in the land or a homeland.

In this thesis, I wish to examine a selection of Mennonite fiction for each author's presentation of the Mennonites' relation to the land. To this end, I will analyze the works using Walter Brueggemann's categories of histories of landedness and landlessness as a structure for identifying the Mennonites' relation to the land. In so doing, the writings can be seen as authors' visions of the Mennonites' own histories of landedness and landlessness, and their ongoing search for place in the land.

What becomes evident from the analysis is that the relation of land and faith in the Mennonite novels in many ways parallels Brueggemann's descriptions of the Israelites' experience of land. The Mennonites' experience histories of landedness and landlessness wherein their relation to the land profoundly influences their faith.

However, even as these authors portray the Mennonite experience of land as Old Testament in type, all of the works to be examined also include a call to break away from land-oriented faith. The authors' visions of true Christian life emphasize an individualistic, spirit-centered faith over against the communal, institutional, land-oriented faith of tradition. It is an existentialist, New Testament type of faith in that it involves personal choice, decision, and action based on discipleship in Christ; it is spirit centered as opposed to land related.

It must also be recognized that the Israelites and Mennonites are not the only groups in human history to suffer land loss. It is a phenomenon that is both ancient and global. The Israelites and Mennonites are but two representatives of the larger issue of rootlessness and alienation that is always the result of land loss/displacement. Peter Berger, in his book The Homeless Mind, determines that the high mobility and increasing urbanization of modern society have created this very problem in contemporary life. (62)

This topic is also particularly relevant for contemporary Mennonite self-understanding. The ever increasing participation of Mennonites in contemporary urban societies has called into question the nature of Mennonite faith identity. The requirements that Mennonite faith must be lived in a setting isolated from the larger world and in avoidance of non-Mennonites are considered by

many Mennonites today to be anachronistic ideologies. Moreover, the connection between Mennonite faith and working the land has, in part, been severed. Many Mennonites today participate in the landless nomadic society that characterizes modern life. In many respects, Mennonites today resemble the urban heterogeneous group that characterized the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century. Appropriately, there is a trend to re-examine the meaning of Mennonite faith and identity in the context of these original Anabaptists' writings, before it was that cultural and ethnic influences played a part in the Mennonites' life of faith.(63) This trend is also evident in Mennonite literature, particularly in the work of Rudy Wiebe. As literature is both a reflection of and a contribution to the development of a people's self-understanding, the meaning of land as presented in Mennonite literature can play an important role in this process of re-discovery.

NOTES

1. Rudy Wiebe's novel The Blue Mountains of China is an exception to this statement. As an epic novel, it spans a time period closer to one hundred years than to fifty years.

2. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 3.

3. Ibid., pp. xvi, xvii.

4. See J. F. Cragham, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Biblical Theology Bulletin 8 (April 1978): 91-92; R. C. Dentan, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Journal of Biblical Literature 97 (December 1978): 577-578; H. O. Forshey, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Catholic Biblical Quarterly 40 (April 1978): 232-233; A. Phillips, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Theology 82 (January 1979): 55-57; W. Johnstone, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Expository Times 89 (January 1978): 124.

5. In The Land, p. xvi, Brueggemann writes: "I have persistently been mindful of critical scholarly judgement, which I take most seriously. I have not knowingly violated any seriously established critical judgement." See also W. D. Davies, The Gospel and the Land (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1974).

6. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1959), p. 29.

7. Ibid., pp. 51, 34.

8. Ibid., pp. 42-47, 62-65. Also Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1958), pp. 367-385.

9. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 4, 5.

10. Ibid., p. 4.

11. Ibid., p. 5.

12. Ibid., p. 3.

13. Ibid., p. 5.

14. Ibid., p. 2.

15. Ibid., p. 189.
16. Ibid., pp. xv, 6-14.
17. Ibid., pp. 1-3.
18. Ibid., p. 8.
19. George H. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought (New York: Harper and Bros., 1968), p.12.
20. Ibid., pp. 12-15.
21. Paul Tournier, A Place for You (London, England: SCM Press, 1968), p. 12.
22. See Hosea 2:14-20.
23. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise, pp. 17, 18, 28-65.
24. This outline is not a complete analysis of land motifs in the Bible. It is designed only to highlight those Biblical land motifs most central to this thesis.
25. For more complete details see C. H. Smith, Story of the Mennonites, 5th ed. (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981), and C. J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967).
26. J. H. Kauffman and Leland Harder, Anabaptists Four Centuries Later (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1974).
27. Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), p. 4. Frank Epp also notes that the Mennonites in the Netherlands stand as an exception to this trend.
28. Ibid., p. 4.
29. For more complete details see George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) and Tielmann van Braght, Martyrs Mirror (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1950).
30. Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940, p. 4: ". . . there had been academics, professionals, craftsmen, and artisans among the sixteenth century Anabaptist pioneers--but their repeated search for seclusion and security had always pointed in rural directions."
31. The word "world" here denotes the political, religious, cultural, and geographical dimensions of the larger world.

32. Robert Friedmann, A Theology of Anabaptism (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 38f.

33. Franklin Littel, The Anabaptist View of the Church, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), p. 109.

34. H. J. Hillerbrand, The Protestant Reformation (New York: Walker and Co., 1968), pp. 132-133.

35. There are numerous books and articles detailing the major tenets of Anabaptist faith. For a good general overview see J. A. Oosterbaan, "The Reformation of the Reformation: Fundamentals of Anabaptist Theology." Mennonite Quarterly Review 51 (July 1977): 171f.

36. Friedmann, Anabaptist Theology, p. 82.

37. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," in Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale: Herald Press 1957), p. 48.

38. John C. Wenger, ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Scottsdale:Herald Press, 1956), p. 679.

39. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise, p. 74.

40. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940.

41. Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951): 17-33.

42. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940, pp. 140-141.

43. The following paragraph is based on information from David Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review (October 1973, January 1974).

44. Ibid., p. 50.

45. For a full exposition see Chapter One of this study and also Friedmann, Anabaptist Theology.

46. See Menno Simons, "Foundation of the Christian Doctrine," in The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, ed. John C. Wenger, pp. 105f.

47. John B. Toews, "The Origins and Activities of the Mennonite Selbstschutz in the Ukraine," in Mennonite Quarterly Review 46 (January 1972): 7-10.

48. Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," p. 21.

49. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940. pp. 498-499.
50. Margaret Reimer and Ken Loewen, Meditations on a place and a way of life (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1982), p. 11.
51. Toews, "Selbstschutz," p. 7.
52. Ibid., pp. 7-10.
53. For more complete details see John B. Toews, Lost Fatherland (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967) and Czars, Soviets and Mennonites (Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982).
54. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940. p. 3.
55. Toews, Lost Fatherland. p. 126.
56. Kauffman and Harder, Four Centuries Later. p. 291.
57. Indeed, their search has taken them as far afield as the Canadian north, the Paraguayan Chaco, and the far eastern regions of Russia.
58. B. G. Vanderhill, "The Passing of the Pioneer Fringe in Western Canada," Geographical Review 72 #2 (April 1982): 200-217.
59. Harry Loewen, "Canadian Mennonite Literature: Longing for a Lost Homeland," in The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-speaking Canadians (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984): 73f.
60. Ibid., p. 77.
61. Ibid.
62. See Peter Berger, The Homeless Mind (New York: Random House, 1973) for more complete analysis.
63. Kauffman and Harder, Four Centuries. p. 292 and Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940. pp. 545-548. Harold S. Bender's "Anabaptist Vision" signals the beginning of scholarly interest in returning to Anabaptist roots.

CHAPTER TWO

A Russian Dance of Death

I.

Dietrich Neufeld's A Russian Dance of Death has been chosen as the first work to be examined in this study for two reasons. Categorically, it cannot be exclusively labelled as fiction; Neufeld did not set out to write a creative or imaginative work of fiction. The English version, translated by Al Reimer in 1979, is a compilation of three books the author originally wrote in German and published on separate occasions. (1) The first book is actually a diary Neufeld maintained while experiencing the life-threatening turmoil of the Russian Revolution and Civil war. In the second book, Neufeld writes a quasi-historical account of the massacre that occurred in his home village--Zagradovka. The third book is a fictionalized autobiography of the author's escape out of Russia.

This progression of perspective--from personal memoir to historical account to fictional form--is in itself significant, for it parallels the development of Mennonite literature in general. Following the Mennonites' nightmarish experience in Russia, their published literature generally took the form of personal

memoir or historical recount, and only subsequently did authors pursue a truly fictional form for their writing.(2)

Also in relation to the general development of Mennonite literature, Neufeld's books represent the first of their kind in Russian-Mennonite writing. While pioneering the Russian steppes, concern for survival left Mennonites no time or inclination for artistic endeavors. Subsequent prosperity continued to orient minds toward agricultural and materialistic pursuits.(3) As a result, art took on connotations of idleness and even evil.(4) Practically no imaginative literature emerged from the Mennonites in Russia until tragedy rocked their secure and orderly existence.(5) Neufeld's writing represents one of the first voices crying out of this wilderness. His work is the product of an artist's soul bursting to "write himself free" from the suffering he sees all around him. These factors make Neufeld's book a suitable precursor to the works that follow in subsequent chapters.

Regarding the relation of land and faith, nowhere does Neufeld deliberately or outrightly address the topic. However, as it is an essential factor contributing to the tragedy of destruction the Mennonites suffered in Russia, the theme often lies just beneath the surface of Neufeld's words. His critical evaluation of the self-defense units, for example, contains weighty implications regarding the significance of land in relation to faith. In terms of Brueggemann's categories,

the book as a whole can be seen as an account of the Mennonites' reactions to the loss of their land and "landed" way of life. This experience of the Mennonites parallels to a certain extent the Israelites' ordeal of exile from Canaan in the sixth century, B.C. On this occasion, the Israelites, like the Mennonites in A Russian Dance of Death, suffer sudden land loss.

For both Mennonites and Israelites, the loss of land is incurred by political oppression. In twentieth century Russia, the Mennonites lost their land to Bolsheviks and Anarchists; while in sixth century B.C. Canaan, the oppressors were Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian warriors. According to Brueggemann's analysis, however, political overpowering was merely the work of an instrument of a higher power.(6) The Israelites lost the land because it was God's deliberate intention that it should happen. Israel had become unfaithful to the word of Yahweh, therefore, God took away the land using the power of Babylon as his tool.

Although we cannot claim insight into God's intention regarding the Mennonites, an analysis of the situations of Mennonites and Israelites reveals several likenesses. The reactions of the Mennonites to their situation also parallel those of the Israelites in some respects. Generally, the Mennonites in A Russian Dance of Death react to their loss in three ways--by despair, self-defense, and escape to new land. It is upon these three reactions that I will focus my analysis.

II.

Book one is the diary of Dietrich Neufeld's experience of the Russian Revolution and Civil war in the Mennonite village of Khortitza-Rosental. The first entry of the diary neatly prepares the stage for the ensuing drama. For one thing, it introduces the reader to the author's perspective. It is important to note that Neufeld is not a typical Mennonite of his time. Rather, he is an example of the educated and more broad-minded Mennonites that were beginning to emerge from the populace just prior to the Russian Revolution.(7) As a result of his education and heightened awareness, Neufeld often regards his fellow Mennonites with critical objectivity. His artistic nature no doubt also fosters in him a perspective somewhat removed from the average colonists.

Neufeld's attitude toward his fellow villagers is symbolized in the first entry: "From . . . high up on a slope I look down . . ."(8) Later, he states it outrightly: ". . . I don't know what the villagers interests and concerns are nor what rumors are making the rounds. I don't want to know."(9) The statement clearly removes Neufeld from the realm of the general thoughts and lifestyle of the Mennonite villagers' world.

Neufeld's faith is likewise atypical. Rarely does he speak of faith or God; rather, he uses expressions such as fate, hope, and optimism. Consequently, much of

what he writes typifies him as a "liberal humanist." (10) However, Neufeld's attitudes about brotherly love, the way of peace, and the suffering church, reveal a thinking that is authentically within Mennonite tradition. One can, I think, surmise that behind his words of hope and fate lies a sustaining faith. (11) The extremely ethnic faith of the Mennonites of his day, may be one factor that inhibits Neufeld from expressing his thoughts in religious terminology. (12) The language, in this case, would reflect his chosen status as an outsider. One must also consider that Neufeld is suffering persecution by atheistic powers. If a diary filled with expressions of faith were to be discovered by Makhnovites or Bolsheviks, he would certainly suffer their wrath.

In addition to revealing the author's perspective, the first entry of the diary presents a partial portrait of village life as it was prior to the tragedy that fills the diary's pages:

I look down over the peaceful settlement . . . I can see . . . fine farmsteads, half-a-dozen steam flourmills, several farm implement factories, and a brickyard topped by tall chimneys. There are also banks, shops, schools, and hospitals in the community. (13)

Drawing on Brueggemann's terminology, the picture is clearly of a "landed" people. (14) Despite the war that has "knocked their world out of kilter," this community appears prosperous and secure. (15) Neufeld's assertion that "these industrious people are sure to make their agriculture, trade, and industry, as well as their

schools and welfare institutions, flourish again when these turbulent times are over," distinctly reflects Brueggemann's description of landed people as those who "cling to continuities and believe that old forms surely continue."(16)

Lastly, the first entry foreshadows the action that is to come. Contrary to Neufeld's own assertion of Mennonite historical continuity, he also affirms that "the old conditions and traditions" are gone.(17) For the first time in over one hundred years, the Mennonites' religious conviction to live as "die Stillen im Lande" is threatened:

Even these peaceful Mennonite settlers who up till now have remained aloof from all history-making events are caught up in the general upheaval. They no longer enjoy the peace which dominated their steppe for so long. They are no longer permitted to live in seclusion from the world.(18)

Although hopeful that the change is the coming of a "new era", Neufeld's optimism is tainted by his political insight:

Looking closely at Russia's recent history one has a premonition of events to come which will be even more fateful than those we have already experienced. The political atmosphere is oppressive . . . (19)

The above two statements contain an almost clairvoyant insight into both the cause and effect of the Mennonites' downfall in Russia. As the diary continues, the reader experiences along with Neufeld, the political oppression that completely destroyed the Mennonites' peaceful and isolated lifestyle.

The diary entries date from Sept. 1919 to March 1920. During this time, Mennonite villagers were caught in the crossfire of the civil war. They were required to service both Czarist and Bolshevik armies with food, shelter, and equipment. In addition, their lives and remaining material goods were ravaged by the bandits of anarchy, the inimitable followers of "freedom fighter" Nestor Makhno.(20) Perhaps the most terrible scourge of all was the force of the typhus epidemic that followed in the wake of the first destroyers. Neufeld's diary focuses primarily on this epidemic and the activities of the Makhnovites who carried the disease into Mennonite villages.

The first incident Neufeld describes in his diary symbolically expresses that which occurs for all of Mennonite society. An old grandmother is forced to look on as bandits of anarchy rummage through her chest of drawers. She, "the very model of the order-loving housewife," is indignant that these barbarians should so disrespectfully rummage through her carefully arranged nest of trinkets. "Stop!" she cries, and steps forward to display the contents of the boxes herself. Twice she attempts to intervene the bandits' pillage, announcing in confidant Low-German, "He woat nich schloane." (21) He won't hit me! Inevitably, she is "knocked senseless" by a blow from a gun barrel. Mennonite society, like the grandmother with her trinkets, had lived a hundred years

of carefully ordered prosperity. Now, their valuables, their reality, and their lives are suddenly "knocked senseless" by bands of resentful Russian peasants.

Neufeld includes other profiles of loss that magnify this tragedy. H. H. Epp, a wealthy and prominent member of the village, flees in fear for his life, leaving his wife and children as vulnerable as "a Makhnovite to lice." Epp, like many, loses his wealth, livelihood, and community. Still others witness the brutal torture and death of family members, and for many more it is the occasion of "death's final dance."(22)

Brueggemann informs us that this is the nature of land-loss: "The end of land . . . means the collapse of all public institutions and all symbolic expressions of well being and coherence."(23) And this is precisely what happens to the Mennonites in A Russian Dance of Death. Their land is taken over first by Anarchists and then Bolsheviks for redistribution to Russian peasants. And with the loss of land, the Mennonites also experience the collapse of family, church, community, and livelihood, or in other words, all of the historical continuities that structure reality and meaning in their lives. For the Mennonites, the sense of Russia as "place," characterized by security, prosperity, and the presence of God in history, vanishes like their material possessions in the arms of soldiers and bandits.(24)

In effect, these Mennonites witness their wilderness paradise abruptly transformed into wilderness

wasteland.(25) In the context of this terminology, the event marks a radical end to the historical process the Mennonites had experienced for over a century. Their entire history in Russia had been characterized by the progressive transformation of wasteland to paradise--from barren steppe to flourishing agricultural community.

Likewise, beginning with God's promise to Abraham in Egypt until their arrival in Canaan, the Israelites' entire history had been marked by a progressive movement toward their promised land.(26) The fulfillment of promise represented both a culmination of the historical process and also the ongoing progression of covenant history. The loss of land brings an end to this process. The history of promise, of security, and of prosperity end with land-loss; and in this sense, it is the end of history. The people's history of life in the land and landed existence comes to an end.

The extreme nature of the event of land-loss elicits equally extreme feelings of displacement. Neufeld himself expresses this sentiment: "We Mennonites are aliens in this land. . . . This is no longer our homeland."(27) As previously mentioned, Neufeld documents three basic reactions to this tragedy of displacement. All three can be seen as reactions of faith directly linked to the land.

The response witnessed primarily in part I is that of despair. Survivors confront a life so foreign to them, many fall into despondency. They cannot farm, for

their machinery, livestock, and even grain seed has been stolen. They are bereft of all personal comfort, and many are homeless and without food. Lastly, the always reliable continuities of family and community have been broken by death. The rootlessness of this existence causes complete despair. Neufeld describes these sufferers as having relinquished all desire to live: "Faces are fixed in stony expressions of resignation or apathy. Eyelids twitch in pain and mouths are etched in grief: there is no hope left in those faces.(28)

Neufeld himself occasionally falls prey to this malady. During these times the ambiguity of existence overwhelms him: ". . . what is left for us except sorrow and want, emptiness and death? . . . now all we can do is lie down and die. . . . What will become of us?"(29)

This reaction is basically an expression of deep pathos over land-loss. Israel, too, mourns the loss of her land. The response in Lamentations expresses much the same sorrow. Israel, the abandoned widow, the homeless orphan, is without comfort.(30) Her sorrow is a suffering of displacement and alienation. The depth of these feelings is revealed in the writer's expression of envy of the dead: "Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, who pined away, stricken by want of the fruits of the field."(31) With striking similarity, Neufeld describes the sentiments of the surviving Mennonites: "At least the dead are relieved of

all their sufferings. Many of the living actually envy them. So long as we are alive we require food and other provisions."(32)

This reaction of despair raises an important question. Can a historical faith survive the end of history? It would seem that for these Mennonites Neufeld refers to, faith was overwhelmed by despair. As outlined in chapter one, the very institutional nature of religion in Mennonite colonies in Russia never required individual commitments or decisions of faith. Perhaps, for some Mennonites, faith was so integrally linked to their way of life that their faith could not sustain the loss of the historically supportive structures of land and landed existence. For these Mennonites, the end of land was also the end of faith in God. This notion resurfaces in the context of the second response to landlessness and will be discussed more fully in that context.

II.

The second response to landlessness is documented most fully in part II, "The Ordeal of Zagradovka." It represents an opposite reaction to the first described above. Rather than resign themselves to certain torment, the Mennonites of Zagradovka choose to obtain weapons and organize themselves into self-defense units (Selbstschutz) in an effort to protect their lives and possessions.(33)

In part II, Neufeld's narrative changes

substantially. Neufeld himself does not experience the ordeal of which he writes. Rather, he approaches the event as a historian, relying on the eyewitness accounts of others to embellish his story. In a rather fragmented way, Neufeld presents the horror that was the destruction of his home village, and the political/emotional circumstances that provoked it. Although reporting from a historian's perspective, Neufeld does not endeavor to maintain any semblance of objectivity. Rather, he betrays an emotional involvement of great passion. Anger and bitterness pervade his writing, especially when he turns his attention to the issue of the Mennonite Selbstschutz.

The opening pages of the section describe, in first person, Neufeld's departure from the Old Colony and arrival at Muensterberg, the first of the destroyed villages in the path of his travel. The desolate scene before him is dreadful, the silence deafening:

Not a sound anywhere. Not even the barking of a dog. Not a person to be seen in the farmyard in front of me. A dreadful hush in the dark of the moon.

The house no longer bore a roof. Through the eerily gaping window-holes I could see blackened inner walls. Trees devoid of life or motion surrounded walls which once had enclosed a happy home. (34)

The description is an ugly foreshadowing of what he is yet to confront. But rather than continue the narrative to the logical conclusion of his arrival in ZagradoVka, Neufeld diverts to a discussion of the political circumstances that preceded the crisis of destruction. Neufeld analyzes the cause and effect of the Selbstschutz with a critical finger pointed at the

Mennonites. In his view, the Mennonites' isolated lifestyle fostered a political naiveté that, in turn, caused them to "foolishly" misinterpret political events. (35)

The retrospective view of historical scholarship supports Neufeld's assessment:

The overwhelming majority of the Mennonites were absolutely apolitical. Few of them read any Russian newspapers; they knew little of the seething cauldron of agitation that was threatening the Czarist regime. . . . and most of them cared even less about what was happening about them. . . . (36)

And again, the experience of Israel informs us that this is the nature of life before the land is lost. The comment about Israel in Lamentations 4:12 reflects a similar problem among the Israelites: "The kings of earth did not believe, or any of the inhabitants of the world, that foe or enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem." Of Israelites and Mennonites alike, no one really believed they could lose the land.

Neufeld presents himself as a Jeremiah-like figure in that he seems to harbor some insight. He writes of how he tried to warn the colonists of the consequences of their actions and bitterly condemns the Selbstschutz as both a moral and a tactical blunder. (37) And like Jeremiah condemning the Israelites apostasy, Neufeld recalls the Mennonites' four hundred-year history of commitment to pacifism, declaring:

One can criticize the Zagradovka Mennonites for taking up arms instead of holding fast to the principle of non-resistance. As good Christians they had no right to show hatred toward their neighbor.

Their duty was to love him even when he wronged them. . . . A Mennonite who surrenders the fundamental idea of peace and affirms war has judged himself. He is no longer a Mennonite. (38)

Neufeld, in the tradition of his earliest forefathers, is adamant that "to suffer wrong is better than to do wrong." (39)

In addition, Neufeld criticizes that the Mennonites' resorting to arms exposed them to their Russian neighbors as self-centered political hypocrites, thus inciting the peasants to more violent acts of revenge:

A bitter truth was held up to the colonists: "When our Russia," so it went, "our women and children, were threatened with attack in 1914, then you refused to take up arms for defensive purposes. But now that it's a question of your own property you are arming yourselves." (40)

The Mennonites of Zagradovka, indeed, suffer almost total annihilation for their "selfish" attitude. Moreover, the hypocrisy of the Mennonites that the Russians so resent is an issue about land.

Neufeld himself regards the quarrel between the Mennonites and their Russian neighbors as an issue about land. (41) The Russians' desire for land and the Mennonites' reluctance to cooperate with redistribution procedures, created an animosity between the two groups that Neufeld describes as "mutual hatred." (42) Using the village of Muensterberg as his example, Neufeld describes how each people's desire for land resulted in the destruction of that village. Neufeld conjectures that quarrels over land allotments reached such a heightened

pitch that the Russian peasants enlisted the aid of Makhno's banditry to destroy the village.(43) After bandits devastated the town, "the local peasants laid claim to the collective farmlands."(44) So the Mennonites concern to keep their land was the very factor that contributed to its loss.

As Neufeld presents these events, it becomes evident that he feels that the Mennonites' preoccupation with land superseded their historical religious conviction about the practice of brotherly love and the way of the suffering church. Neufeld expresses his bitter contempt:

The Mennonites were not exactly disposed to love their enemies. One could hardly expect such an exalted level of Christian charity from the German colonists, whose cultural practices tended to lag well behind their ethical claims. Measured strictly by their own emphasis on positive Christianity, however, they [Mennonites] might have been expected to manifest a higher moral level.(45)

This statement supports the idea mentioned in reference to the response of despair. Perhaps the upheaval these Mennonites endured was, indeed, too overwhelming a tragedy for their simple faith. It can be conjectured that because of the historical lack of necessity for personal, individual commitments of faith, the Mennonite colonists identified their faith with the institutions that defined and supported it. With the loss of those institutions, their faith degenerated to meaninglessness.

One might also question whether Mennonite

faith had already degenerated to meaninglessness prior to the tragedy of land loss. Neufeld's presentation of the Mennonites' denial of religious tradition, and their covetousness of "their" land, certainly points to such a conclusion. From his perspective, the Mennonites had indeed become graspers of the land.

Drawing further on Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites' experiences of the land as a paradigm for understanding the relation of land and faith in Mennonite experience, it can be conjectured that land was lost because faith had become apostasy. For, as we shall see, in the situation of landedness, faith tends to become obscured by preoccupation with the land.

It is clear in the words of Jeremiah that the land was lost because the people of Israel had turned away from Yahweh and his word.(46) Israel is presented in the image of a harlot, whose infidelity is to both covenant relation and the land.(47) In particular, Israel had turned away from God's word about the land.

The history of royal land management is the story of Israel securing the land for herself outside of covenant.(48) The kings of Israel, those appointed to manage the land, forget the covenant perception of land as inheritance. Their overriding concern is ownership of the land.(49) By their actions, the land that was inheritance becomes abomination; and so, by Yahweh's hand the land is lost.(50)

Walter Brueggemann describes the effect

selfish securing of land has upon the people of Israel. It is these descriptions of the nature of faithless land management that bear particular insight for our analysis of Neufeld's depiction of the Mennonites in Russia.

Primarily, the Israelites, during their years as a landed people, become self-oriented--so self-oriented that they can no longer recognize or remember who gave them the land: "Israel had become numbed and dull, stupid . . . non-reflective . . . Covenantal realities had lost their power for Israel. It knew itself to be neither addressed nor accountable."(51) As a result, the life of the people of Israel became one of "self-seeking complacence" and "self-indulgent consumerism."(52) Both history and covenant are forgotten.

After the reign of David, the kings of Israel come to regard the land as a commodity which they both covet and exploit.(53) Writes Brueggemann:

The very land that promised to create space for human joy and freedom became the very source of dehumanizing exploitation and oppression. . . . Society became the frantic effort of the landed to hold onto the turf, no matter what the cost.(54)

The cost, indeed, was dear. During the reign of Solomon, a bureaucratic state was established: ". . . built upon coercion in which free citizens were enslaved for state goals. Remarkably, in one generation, he [Solomon] managed to confiscate Israel's freedom and reduce social order to the very situation of Egyptian slavery."(55) Land ownership is bought for the price of freedom.

Drawing on Jeremiah's distinctions between justice and righteousness/cedar and vermillion, Brueggemann further defines royal management from the reign of Solomon to the time of exile as kings who traded justice and righteousness for cedar and vermillion: "Nothing here of Torah but only horses, wives, silver and gold."(56) In other words, selfish materialistic pursuits replaced covenant faith. Kingly ownership and rule of the land was total.

When finally Jeremiah announces the end of land: "Israel had been engaged for so long in a consumptive form of life, in self-seeking, that it became constitutionally impossible to address this other one [Yahweh] in a committed way."(57) Having land seduces Israel into not just a state of amnesia, but into an amnesia incapable of knowing:(58)

Israel controls a lot of data as royal consciousness does, but this knowing [that] consists in bowing before and trusting in, it cannot do. Israel's knowing is all of a monologic kind, of subject handling object, but knowing Yahweh as covenantal Lord escapes it, as it always does those bent on singularly self-sufficient management.(59)

So land is lost and history in the land is ended.

Part of the nature of Israel's infidelity, then, is characterized by selfishness over the land.(60) Slavery, materialism, and ownership are the key words depicting Israel's history of land management. These terms could as well be applied to the situation of the Mennonites in Russia prior to their experience of land-loss.

The issue of land ownership in the Mennonite colonies in Russia is a good example of how land fostered amnesia and vice. Neufeld himself makes only casual references to this issue. Hence, I will rely on the accounts of historians to provide the background details upon which Neufeld predicates his comments.

In the 1860's, the problems of rapid population growth and a land-law prohibiting the division of farmlands among heirs, combined to create a society of "landless proletariat" in Mennonite colonies. For the most part, these people were regarded by the landholders as second class citizens; which points clearly to the significance of land in Mennonite society at that time.(61) However, the size of the landless population was immense.

In the Molotchna colony, this group comprised nearly two thirds of the district population. These people were denied not only land, but were also deprived of the right to vote in village and district affairs. The obligation to pay taxes, however, was sustained.

In order to survive, some of the landless entered business, trade, or industry.(62) However, the majority of them, "gave little thought to any occupation other than farming," and so, worked as hired hands often on their own family farms.(63) The majority of them were also acutely dissatisfied with their lot in life.

A ready solution to the problem did exist.(64) Large areas of communal land had been set

aside to accommodate landless families. However, wealthy landowners had since discovered that a profit could be made by leasing these areas to the "proletariat." Not only did their wealth increase from collected land rents, but by keeping families landless, they provided themselves with a supply of cheap labor. Landowners, performing much the same function of land managers as the kings of Israel, thus, subjugated the lower classes to satisfy their own material greed.

The practice of "slavery" also extended to the neighboring Russian peasants. For the most part, these hired hands were outrightly treated as slave labor--receiving low pay and perhaps a place in the hay loft to sleep. Neufeld writes that the relationship between Mennonite landowner and Russian worker was that of "capitalist master and inferior servant and not that of equals or brothers."(65)

The church also supported this practice: "The church leaders were for the most part well-to-do farmers, who shared economic interests similar to those of the landowners."(66) Thus, the land seduced the conscience of both the church and landowners into greed for wealth.

Dissension between the "Anwohner" (marginal people) and the "Wirte" (landholders) escalated to a situation of "class hatred."(67) Hence, greed for land and wealth effectively undermined the communities' religious principle of brotherly love. Community leaders

governed according to "selfishness and rudeness of the human heart." (68)

The problem was finally resolved in a bitterly ironic way; that is, by appeal of the landless to the Russian government. In 1866, an "Imperial Rescript" laid the foundation for the establishment of daughter colonies, whereby, the landless would have farmlands made available to them. (69) That Mennonites had to appeal to the state against fellow Mennonites to solve their problem clearly reflects the dissolution of the brotherhood church of Anabaptism.

Even with this solution, however, "social differentiation or stratification" continued to exist in Mennonite society. (70) The political strife of war and the Russian Revolution even failed to unify class differentiation, as suffering often equalizes all humanity. In fact, as Neufeld describes it, the Revolution had the reverse effect:

As a consequence of the Revolution an evil, unbrotherly disaffection often appeared between the more affluent and the poorer Mennonites in Zagradovka. The landowners were reluctant to allow the landless a vote in congregational affairs, as the Bolsheviks had decreed they must. (71)

The emergence of social stratification over the issue of land bears significant implications about the faith of the Mennonite people. Both Neufeld and other historians point out how the land comes to dominate the minds of Mennonites to the extent that their religious mandate to love one's brother is overruled in the cases of

fellow Mennonites and neighboring Russian peasants.

These observations certainly indicate an atrophy of religious consciousness. Neufeld confirms this state of affairs at the end of part II. In a eulogy to his brother, Henry Neufeld, who was killed in the Zagradovka massacre, Neufeld describes the level of religious consciousness among the colonists and the dearth of true Christian activists like his brother:

The Zagradovka Mennonites have little social awareness. It has not been inculcated and developed enough, although Henry Neufeld tried to awake through his sermons precisely such an active concern for others. His words always made a deep impression and provided much food for thought. For a long time, however, he was a voice crying in the wilderness in advancing views designed to lead our Mennonites from mere lip-service to an active Christianity, to a higher ethical plane.(72)

Historian Cornelius Krahn reiterates Neufeld's assessment: "The Gospel had become all too much a 'Sunday' affair. Religion had hardened into a form, outwardly correct, but inwardly cold and dead."(73) He also contends that it is the behavior of the landowners toward the lower classes that most clearly reveals the Mennonites' atrophied faith.(74) Thus, the land, here again, plays a dominant role in shaping faith.

The issue of land also played a part in the development of schisms in the church.(75) As we have seen, the church supported the interests of wealthy landowners, leaving the poor and landless quite neglected. In the early 1800's, one group--having become

disillusioned by the faithless practices of the church--broke away from the established church to form the Kleine Gemeinde. In 1833, one pastor from this group penned a document entitled, "Faith and Reason." (76) Generally, the article presents an analysis of the diseased Mennonite church and a call to return to Anabaptist principles of faith and life. For our purposes, it provides an insightful embellishment to Neufeld's description of the Mennonites. In the pastor's view, the rise of secularism and a preoccupation with "riches and things of the world" had tainted the contemporary church. He lists the "passionate habits" of the Mennonites--among them: "pride, ostentation, greed for money, and lust for wealth, avarice . . . luxury . . . vicious life." (77) The description is starkly reminiscent of Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the "cedar and vermillion" interests of the kingly Israelites discussed earlier.

The example of the land issue in Russia illuminates how greed for land in Mennonite society led to the destruction of the brotherhood, the stratification of society, and social dissension. All of these historical indications affirm Neufeld's assessment, like Brueggemann's assessment of the Israelites, that the Mennonites became preoccupied with ownership and covetousness of the land, to the loss of their faith. The land, in both cases, is mismanaged because it is regarded as owned property rather than acknowledged as covenant

gift. In both cases, the result is social strife and finally loss of land.

In light of these conclusions, one might legitimately question whether the Mennonites suffer landlessness because of the apostasy of their selfishness over land, rather than because of political maneuverings beyond their considerable control. The example of Israel, of course, informs us that coveting land is the sure way to land-loss. Referring to the Israelites' land-loss, Brueggemann writes:

Land is not lost, history is not denied, because of some political eventuality, but because of the enmity of holiness in the midst of history. We of course do not believe that in our time about turns in land and in history. But they did not then either. (78)

Of course, we cannot make the radical assumption that, simply because the attitudes and resulting social situation of the Mennonites in Russia parallel those of the Israelites in Brueggemann's analysis, God's judgement of wrath repeats itself in history. However, as Neufeld presents it, the formation of the Selbstschutz and the state of religious consciousness of Mennonites in general manifest a selfish, unbrotherly people concerned to cling to their land. In any case, the true significance of these observations is what they reveal about the influence of the land on the Mennonites' life of faith. Essentially, the Old Testament pattern as presented by Brueggemann is duplicated in Neufeld's presentation. Landedness leads to forgetfulness

and selfishness, which ends in loss of land.

IV.

Both of the first two responses to landlessness--despair and self-defense--indicate that the Mennonites' faith and life was lived closely connected to the land. Generally, when they suffered the loss of their land, their faith was exposed as degenerate. It is only in the third response that a sense of ongoing and sustained faith is present; and again, it is integrally linked to land. As previously mentioned, this third response is longing for escape to new land.

In both the first and third parts of A Russian Dance of Death, Neufeld addresses the theme of hope for life in a new land. In part I, Neufeld writes the word "emigration" only three times. But significantly, another word appears alongside it each time--that word is hope. For Neufeld, the two concepts are inseparable. While surrounded by death and disease, he writes in his diary: "Anyone who still clings to life and hope for the future can think only of emigration. . . . It is the one idea that keeps us going, our one hope."(79) One can also see the interrelation of these terms in part III, "Escape from the Maze."

The story follows the journey of three prisoners of war--a North German, a Saxon with his new Russian bride, and a Czech--who pool their resources to facilitate their escape from Russia. The North German is

a rather subdued but intelligent, sensitive, and resourceful character. Contrarily, the Saxon is a somewhat swarthy fellow, more inclined to lose his patience than keep it. His Russian bride is virtually bereft of personality. The Czech is a man of words, often indulging in philosophical ramblings. Of the three men, he is also the most faint-hearted. Neufeld disguises himself as the North German in the story and, from that perspective, he narrates the events of their journey from Kherson province in the Ukraine to his homeland, Germany.

Of the three parts of A Russian Dance of Death, this is the most consciously fictionalized and is also the weakest. The story line often omits detail, leaving the reader with many unanswered questions. Characters, too, are largely without dimension. One reviewer appropriately summarizes the weakness of the story as "tending to draw too many blood out of stone conclusions." (80)

The themes in this book generally parallel those in "Under the Black Flag of Anarchy"; except that, in keeping with the author's non-Mennonite disguise, the world Neufeld describes is non-Mennonite. In this sense, many of the circumstances in the story of "Escape From the Maze" are analagous to the Mennonites' experience of land-loss Neufeld describes in parts I and II. For example, the suffering and feelings of displacement and landlessness that Neufeld describes in part I, reappear in part III in reference to Russian peasants. As well, the

devastation the sojourners confront in their travels effectively portrays an atmosphere of wilderness wasteland.

On one occasion while ambling down the road, the three men discuss the outrageous thievery in Russia--be it banditry, requisitioning, or other--whereupon the Czech summarizes the conditions of existence in Russia. His description could apply to either the Mennonites of Zagradowka or the Russian peasants of the Ukraine:

"All concepts are on shaky ground. It's most unfortunate when principles which have stood for many generations as pillars supporting certain views suddenly collapse and people are unable to find new ones of equal value; after all, values cannot emerge overnight but can only grow with time. Such a situation is not only unfortunate, it's disastrous. . . . The catastrophe comes about precisely because so many people follow the traditional and current laws only through force of habit or, if not through force of habit, then through fear of punishment. When fear of punishment no longer exists, when force of habit is broken, then weak dependent people are governed not by reason but by their passions."(81)

With startling accuracy, Neufeld here describes precisely the nature of existence when land is lost. The Mennonites of Khortitza-Rosental and Zagradowka experience the same upheaval that the Czech here describes as the situation for Russian peasants.

Moreover, we can also see that the same hope that sustains Neufeld through the tragedy of land-loss in Khortitza-Rosental, sustains him also as a North German in the hostile non-Mennonite countryside of the Ukraine. The first indication of the depth of Neufeld's hope is

manifest in the opening paragraph of the story: "As we looked around for the last time, . . . we felt no pain in saying farewell. Our new found hope left no room for regrets."(82)

The journey proceeds without major disturbance until one morning Neufeld's companions inform him of their intent to relinquish their dream of escape. Their hope had dwindled and, along with it, their determination. Neufeld himself is devastated by the news: "The idea of giving up my long cherished dream horrified me."(83) In fact, Neufeld is so filled with the idea of freedom from Russia that he decides to continue the journey in solitude, despite the evident danger of such an undertaking. As it happens, the influence of a few well-placed words from a shrewd old Russian peasant reinforces Neufeld's companions' weakened resolution and they resume their travels.

The next barrier to stall the travellers is a battle front. The Bolsheviks and Ukrainian Nationalists are waging war. Thus temporarily halted, Neufeld and his companions settle on the farmstead of a local peasant to await a shift in the battle line. As they wait, the tension of delay is almost unbearable for Neufeld: "The mere thought of being forced to postpone the journey home was inexpressibly painful to me. I clung desperately to the hope that somehow it would be possible to find a way through the front. . . . I simply wasn't prepared to turn back. The very idea made me shiver."(84) Here again is a

vivid expression of the depth of Neufeld's hope and determination. It is the power that sustains him in the surrounding wilderness.

Neufeld's undaunted hope reaps its reward. The battle front passes over them and they are once again able to resume travel. The final pages of the book describe the nighttime exodus of the group through the Sluch River and onto Polish soil. The terror and suspense of the experience are poorly depicted, but enough is communicated to give an impression of the strength of resolve needed to execute the dangerous excursion. The faint-hearted Czech betrays a fright so great he considers remaining behind.

In the end, the journey is successful. After appealing to Polish authorities for transport to Germany, they indeed accomplish their task of escaping Russia. The feeling of freedom is ecstasy: "We were suddenly overcome with the feeling that we had escaped from a monster which had clutched at us with a thousand arms so as to squeeze and choke us slowly but surely until we had gasped out our last breath. We had escaped from it. Free!"(85)

If one reads this story as an autobiography, thus "seeing through" Neufeld's disguise, these expressions make a significant statement about Mennonite faith and the land. All of Neufeld's strength and determination are derived from feelings of hope. These feelings Neufeld depicts, if not identical, are certainly analagous to the broader sentiments of all Mennonites

regarding emigration. In this fictionalized account, Neufeld is returning to a homeland rather than venturing into unknown regions. Nevertheless, because of the autobiographical nature of the tale, one can safely surmise that the basic feelings would be similar. Moreover, whether it is a homeland or a foreign territory, the key point is that the hope is land oriented. That is, there is potential for renewed life on new soil.

Neufeld demonstrates the connection between the land, his hope, and his faith upon arrival in his homeland. In describing his feelings, Neufeld, for the first time, employs an outrightly Christian analogy:

The sun rose but it was an entirely different sun. There was more than a hint of fresh promise in this red morning sky. A feeling of gratitude overcame us, as though we should be sinking to our knees in reverent awe inside a cathedral. (86)

The passage is essentially a reaffirmation of faith. The fulfillment of hope achieved by emigration, carries with it a new recognition of God's presence. Thus, new land symbolizes not only hope for life, but for faith as well.

V.

Dietrich Neufeld's account of the tragic downfall of the Mennonites in Russia and his escape to Germany contain several insights into the relation of land and faith for the Mennonites of that time. Moreover, the historical pattern of landedness to loss of the land is analagous to Brueggemann's assessment of the Israelites.

Both Israelites and Mennonites lose the land through political oppression; and for both, the experience signifies the end of history in the land. Also in both cases, some people respond to the event with sorrow and despair, under the weight of which faith seems to crumble.

Some Mennonites also resort to self-defense and the use of violence. Neufeld describes these actions as indicative of the Mennonites' loss of faith over greed for land. An examination of the nature of Mennonite society in landedness, and its resemblance to Israelite society in landedness, supports Neufeld's portrait. Greed for land seduces the people away from God and the principles of Mennonite religious life, and then, the land is lost. However, we cannot assume that these parallels point conclusively to a repetition of God's judgement upon his people. On the other hand, we can conclude that Neufeld's presentation of the situation portrays the response of self-defense as indicative of faithlessness. In either case, what is more central to our concern is the significance of having land and not having land for the Mennonites' life of faith.

As described in chapter one of this thesis, land was a key ingredient in the Russian Mennonites' life of faith. Generally, faith was lived by working the land and living in isolated, exclusively Mennonite colonies. According to the nature of Mennonite faith, religious values formed the basis of the social, economic, and political structures of society. Due to the pervading and

particular nature of their religion, along with the importance of farming, Mennonite faith became land dependent. Moreover, the fact that the Mennonites were able to live out their two kingdom theology so prosperously and for so long, only sanctioned land-dependence, and thereby, deepened the land/faith bond. As Neufeld presents it, landed existence eventually created a situation wherein the land predominated in Mennonite colonies instead of faith. Life in the land seduced the people to become greedy and selfish land owners. Then, when the land was lost, the people's faith did not sustain them and they fell to despair or violence. Only those, who like Neufeld, clung to the prospect of new land, maintained an enduring faith.

History itself testifies to the reality of the new land/faith connection. The Mennonites who chose to remain in Russia gradually became integrated into Soviet society:

The Mennonites, who are still living in Soviet Russia today, are not free people and independent farmers anymore. Their villages and communities have dissolved. They live scattered in the wide land among an alien race. They are labourers in collectives and factories. Their children attend communist schools, and if any adults seek admittance into a church, they have to join the Baptists or some other evangelical congregation. (87)

In a more up-to-date publication, C.H. Smith writes that a few Mennonite churches have survived in Soviet Russia, but he adds that their "future is not bright." (88)

On the other hand, those Mennonites who migrated to North and South America are described as

"pilgrims of faith."(89) Indeed, many Mennonites who migrated to these countries immediately began the work of re-establishing "landed" communities such as they had known in Russia prior to the Revolution. Emigration and settling in a new land, then, inspired hope not only for escape from the grave Russia had become to the Mennonites, but also represented the opportunity to rebuild the integrated society in which their faith had once flourished. New land meant a new opportunity to work, live, and worship according to the Mennonite traditions of peace and separation--and intrinsic to that, an agricultural vocation. Thus, faith is maintained or renewed on new soil.

This third response is representative of a trend in Anabaptist/Mennonite history. In terms of land, their history is essentially a number of histories--of beginnings and endings in various homelands. The history of Mennonite faith also corresponds to these histories of landedness and landlessness. Faith is tied to the land, but is sustained because of landlessness. In landedness, faith is seduced by the land. Only when the land is lost does renewal of faith become a reality. Thus, the pattern of repeated migration can be seen as the Mennonites' own way of protecting history and faith to ensure its continuation. As we shall see in the following chapters, the problems of complacency in landed existence, the testing of faith in landlessness, and the renewal of faith on new land recur as the story of the Mennonites

continues. Of central importance in all of these situations is that faith is always held in relation to the land.

NOTES

1. Dietrich Neufeld, Ein Tagebuch aus dem Reich des Totentanzes, Germany: Selbstverlag, 1921); Mennonitentum in der Ukraine: Schicksals Geschichte Sogradowkas (Germany: Selbstverlag, 1922); Zu Pferd 1000 km durch die Ukraina (Germany: Selbstverlag, 1922).

2. Dr. Al Reimer, professor of English, University of Winnipeg in conversation. Permission to quote granted.

3. Neufeld himself refers somewhat despairingly to this aspect of Mennonite society, pp. 56, 87, 88.

4. J. H. Janzen, "The Literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites," Mennonite Life 1:1 (January 1946): 22f. Arnold Dyck's novel Verloren in der Steppe poignantly captures the problems of a youth in coming to terms with such attitudes in his own family and Mennonite colony in Russia.

5. Harry Loewen, "Canadian Mennonite Literature: Longing for a Lost Homeland," in The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-speaking Canadians (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 76.

6. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 113.

7. Al Reimer, A Russian Dance of Death, Introduction (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), pp. 4-5.

8. Dietrich Neufeld, A Russian Dance of Death, trans. by Al Reimer, (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), p. 7.

9. Ibid., p. 9.

10. Al Reimer, Introduction, p. 5.

11. There are several indications in the text that this is the case. See for example p. 56, 69, 70, 79, 80, 87, 88.

12. Neufeld expresses his own dissatisfaction with this element of Mennonite life in Part II, "The Ordeal of Zagradowka."

13. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 7 & 9.

14. For a definition of "landed" see chapter one of this study.

15. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 9.
16. Ibid., p. 9 and Brueggemann, Land, p. 131.
17. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 9.
18. Ibid., p. 11.
19. Ibid.
20. For full details on the life and character of Makhno see Victor Peters, Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist (Winnipeg, 1970).
21. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 13.
22. Ibid., p.61.
23. Brueggemann, Land, p. 114.
24. The idea of "place" is essentially the same as "landed." See chapter one of this study.
25. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 26.
26. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 15-44.
27. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 63-64.
28. Ibid., p. 51.
29. Ibid., pp. 53, 54, 60.
30. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 131-132, Lamentations 1:1-22.
31. Lamentations 4:9.
32. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 33-34.
33. This is still a sensitive issue for some Mennonites. See Al Reimer, "Appendix B" in A Russian Dance of Death, pp. 133f.
34. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 67.
35. Ibid., pp. 68-73.
36. David Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review (October 1973, January 1974), p. 52.
37. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 68-73, 79-81.
38. Ibid., p. 80.

39. Ibid., p. 71.
40. Ibid., p. 79.
41. Ibid., p. 68.
42. Ibid., p. 71.
43. Ibid., pp. 75-78.
44. Ibid., p. 77.
45. Ibid., p. 79.
46. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 107-122, Jeremiah 3:1-5, 18:13-17, 21:7, 22:6-9, 24-27, 28:14-16, 29:21-23.
47. Brueggemann, Land, p. 119.
48. Ibid., pp. 90-106.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., pp. 121-122.
51. Ibid., p. 112.
52. Ibid., p. 101.
53. Ibid., pp. 10-11. Brueggemann also notes that Josiah and Hezekiah represent exceptions to this trend.
54. Ibid., p. 11.
55. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
56. Jeremiah 22:13-16, Brueggemann, Land, pp. 11, 89, 114-116. Again, Josiah and Hezekiah are excepted.
57. Brueggemann, Land, p. 121.
58. The term "knowing" here refers to the Biblical definition meaning "to acknowledge covenant loyalty and the accompanying demands," Ibid., p. 105.
59. Brueggemann, Land, p. 105.
60. One, of course, must also recognize that Israel's infidelity is expressed in the worship of other Gods, Ibid., pp. 105-106 and Hosea 2:1-13, Jeremiah 2:7-9, Isaiah 1:11-15.
61. C. J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), p. 133.

62. Rempel, "Commonwealth," p. 26.
63. Dyck, Mennonite History, p. 133.
64. Cornelius Krahn, "Some Social Attitudes of the Mennonites in Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review 9 (October 1935): 167f.
65. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 78.
66. Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951): 17-33.
67. Dyck, Mennonite History, p. 133 and Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," p. 25. You will remember that Neufeld describes the same problem of the Mennonites toward their Russian neighbors, p. 71.
68. Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," p. 26.
69. Ibid., pp. 25-26 and Dyck, Mennonite History, pp. 133-134.
70. Krahn, "Social Attitudes," p. 172.
71. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 88.
72. Ibid., p. 87.
73. Krahn, "Social Attitudes," p. 172.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., pp. 172-173 and Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," pp. 27-30.
76. Robert Friedmann, trans. and ed. "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered in a Treatise of 1833," Mennonite Quarterly Review 22 (April 1948): 89f.
77. Ibid., p. 90.
78. Brueggemann, Land, p. 114.
79. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 51, 64.
80. Gerald Peters, review of A Russian Dance of Death, by Dietrich Neufeld, Mennonite Life (December 1979): 28.
81. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 107.

82. Ibid., p. 89.
83. Ibid., p. 103.
84. Ibid., p. 121.
85. Ibid., p. 126.
86. Ibid.
87. Aaron Klassen ed., In the Fullness of Time (Waterloo, Ont.: Reeve Bean Ltd., 1974), p. 11. One must, of course, recognize that the political oppression in Russia has had a great effect on the failure of the Mennonite churches in Russia. However, what is significant is that those Mennonites who suffered persecution and moved did not lose faith, while those who stayed in Russia amalgamated with larger society.
88. C. H. Smith, Story of the Mennonites, 5th ed. (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981), p. 341.
89. John B. Toews, Lost Fatherland (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), p. 120.

CHAPTER THREE

No Strangers in Exile

I.

No Strangers in Exile is an appropriate sequel to A Russian Dance of Death, for the political events out of which each book is born occurred in historical sequence. The setting of the novel is Russia, about ten years after the time of events chronicled by Neufeld. On the political scene during those years, the Czarist regime had been overthrown, and under the iron fist of Joseph Stalin, Russia was being collectivized. Those Mennonites who remained in Russia confronted a grim destiny. They were being assimilated into farm collectives or imprisoned or exiled to labor camps.

The story of No Strangers in Exile focuses on the lives of a remnant Mennonite community who are exiled from their ancestral home on the Volga steppes to the Vologda forest in the far north. They are Russia's sacrifice to Stalin's Five Year Plan; part of which included the deportation of all "kulaks"--otherwise known as anyone and their family who owned land, machinery, livestock, or a home, and all clergy.(1) On various

pretexts, these hard-working people were shot, or imprisoned, or exiled en masse.(2)

The novel is divided into four parts. Part one details the tortuous journey by train and horse-drawn sleds that transport the group from Moscow to the northern forest. Parts two to four depict the first year-and-a-half of the community's "barrack" existence in the taiga.

Hans Harder, assuming the pseudonym of Alexander Schwarz, first wrote the novel in German in the year 1934, under the title In Wologdas weissen Wäldern. He wrote the book with the specific intention of "awakening" Western societies to the brutality of Soviet activities in Russia.(3) As a result, the book contains some rather didactic and propagandist material. In 1979, Al Reimer translated the book into English. He both edited and expanded the original text with the dual aim of minimizing those elements which culturally and historically confine the story, while increasing "dramatic impact and readability."(4) Consequently, the style, plot, and characters of the two versions are somewhat varied. Places where the German text is stylistically abrupt or characters' motivations are ambiguous appear in the English version both embellished and deepened. Other scenes and characters have been deleted or replaced. Generally, the English translation tends to highlight the elements of the novel relating to the Mennonites' experience, while downplaying the specifically

propagandist or didactic material. The following analysis will refer primarily to the English text.

The analysis itself will examine Harder's presentation of the condition of exile as a state of landlessness, and explore how the faith of the exiles is affected by their new situation in the land. I shall continue to rely on Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the Biblical experience of landedness and landlessness as a paradigm for comparison and illumination.

II.

The situation of exile is a peculiar type of landlessness. For the Israelites, it was unlike the condition of wilderness wandering wherein the people were fed by the hope of promised land. Rather, exile occurred because the land was held and improperly managed.(5) Consequently, the condition of exile is not simply landlessness, but is landlessness freighted with memories of the land and landed existence. Brueggeman describes exile as:

the sharpest point of discontinuity when none of the old traditions or conventional institutions any longer seemed valid or trustworthy. Exile without land or even the prospect of land was indeed Israel's null point when every promise seemed void.(6)

The landlessness of exile is characterized by radical discontinuity and insecurity. The history of life in the land comes to an end, without promise for the future. And because history has ended, the discontinuity between past and present is so extreme that all structures

of meaning and reality fall into confusing ambiguity; traditions are untrustworthy. As a result, life in exile is essentially life lived in a void of disorientation, which breeds insecurity.

The Mennonites' experience of exile, as we see it in Harder's novel, contains all of these elements of the Biblical paradigm. The idea that landed history has surely ended for the Mennonites is portrayed symbolically in the character of Liese, Harm's wife.(7) At seven months pregnant, she is raped by bandits with the result that her baby is stillborn, and then she herself dies.(8) The passage effectively captures the nature of the experience of land-loss for the whole Mennonite commonwealth. The belly of the "plump and rosy" woman, bearer of new life and promise of the continuation of history, is crushed like an "eggshell."(9)

The significance of the symbol of stillbirth increases if one considers the Biblical symbolic value of birth in reference to the promise of God to Abraham and Sarah. The aged and barren Sarah produces an heir, which is a sign from God of his promise of new history and new life in a land that will belong to their descendants.(10) Thus the symbol of birth is directly related to the procurement of land. By applying the value of the Biblical symbolism to the story of Liese, her stillborn infant, conversely, signifies the end of land and the end of promise.

The radical discontinuity between past and

present existence that is the consequence of the end of history is evident in the first pages of the novel. As the group sits huddled in the boxcar that is to carry them from Moscow to Kotlas in the far north, the narrator of the story, Alexander Harms, ruminates over the disparity between the past lives and present condition of each of the familiar faces in the boxcar.(11) Each character sketch emphasizes the alien nature of their present world over against the familiar and idyllic world that has been tragically lost. Harms concludes that the old way of life is truly gone: "Our idyllic old colony with its farms of up to two thousand acres and each farm's three dozen horses . . . We'll never see any of it again."(12) Moreover, their loss leaves them in a void of disorientation. The past has been wiped away and the future is unknown. At present, the perimeters of a boxcar define and contain their whole world. Thus, they exist in a void of timelessness and ambiguity.(13)

The depth of discontinuity between past and present is drawn in sharp relief when the exiles arrive at their destination. Contrasting Harder's descriptions of the place these people once knew as home over against the place in the north that is to become their home adds further support to the notion that history has truly ended. Harms recalls the Mennonite colonies as:

prosperous . . . with their large, solid farmhouses, abundant gardens, well-tilled fields and splendid stock, and energetic and devout farm families with their devotion to tradition and their German language and customs.(14)

Their new location, on the other hand, could not be more different:

Deep in the vast pine forest we arrive at a compound consisting of a dozen dilapidated wooden barracks, each measuring about six by twenty-five meters: a wall down the middle divides them into halves . . . There is no ceiling: the bare board roof is full of gaping cracks and is sagging in the middle where the weight of snow is heaviest. The long cracks have admitted snow into the interior which is furnished only with tiers of rough plank bunks warped and weathered in crazy angles of disrepair. . . . The window openings . . . have been nailed shut with boards. The floor consists of bare, well-trodden earth. In the center stands a large brick stove smeared over in a makeshift way with clay.(15)

The distinction between the two settings is essentially that of the Biblical sown and unsown land and exemplifies our descriptions of wilderness and landlessness discussed in chapter one of this study. That is, in the past, these Mennonites had lived in a paradise they had created in the wilderness of the Russian steppes. This wilderness was an Edenic place of refuge from the world in which its inhabitants had known the security and complacency of landed existence. Their new location is likewise in the wilderness. However, it is a land of hostility and alienation; it is a land that is no land.

Throughout the novel we are reminded of the malevolency of the world into which these Mennonites have been cast. In part one, as the train progresses northward, every narrated glimpse of life outside the boxcar presents a picture of decay, disease, and death.(16) "Fur Cap," the commander of the train and symbol of Soviet power in their midst, is violently

abusive of these people. As Harms attests: ". . . as usual the man doesn't spare even the women and children the grossest abuse and curses."(17) Even the natural environment, with its extreme cold and snow in winter and insects and bogs in summer, is hostile to all living things.

In this aspect, the Mennonites' place of exile closely resembles Brueggemann's description of the nature of unsown land: "To be placed in the wilderness is to be cast into the land of the enemy--cosmic, natural, historical--without any props or resources that give life order and meaning."(18)

In the context of sown and unsown land, the Mennonites are exiled from a flourishing garden to a hostile and barren "northern desert," or from landed paradise to landless wilderness. This reversal of environment type further illuminates the discontinuity between past and present worlds that indicates the radical end of history.

Such immense alteration of environment creates in the exiles a deep sense of alienation. In one way, the people suffer from a sense of dislocation, or of being aliens, due simply to the completely foreign nature of the new environment. But there is also a more deep-seated component which is rooted in the fact that exile is life after the end of history. Of the Israelites' experience, Brueggemann explains:

Exile was not simply displacement from the land

but it was the experience of the end of creation, the exhaustion of salvation history, the demise of king, temple, city, land, and all those supports which give structure and meaning to life. Put in current terminology it was the experience of the death of God.(19)

In like manner, through the voice of Ohm Peters, Harder characterizes the situation of exile for the Mennonites:

"Since we have lost God in Russia, we've also lost the true meaning of home. And so everything has come unravelled."(20)

So, inherent in the loss of land is the loss of all structures whereby the Word of God is known and understood. In Israel's case, the structures were king, temple, city, and land. In the Mennonites' case, they are colony, church, family, and land. In both cases, the structures are intimately connected to the land, for they involve all of the faith traditions that were developed in relation to having land. The absence of these structures causes feelings of alienation that, at bottom, are feelings of estrangement from God. Thus, with loss of land, the structures of faith are also lost and therefore God is lost. In the landlessness of exile, the voice of God is silent.(21)

In No Strangers in Exile, the people's sense of alienation from God is reflected in the community. Part of the historical faith tradition of the Mennonites is that community was regarded as equivalent to the brotherhood church, which was representative of the body of Christ.(22) Thus, in landedness, faith was expressed

through a unified community. Now, with the absence of the traditional structure of the old colony, the people in the boxcar feel the absence of its very center (God). Their feelings of alienation prevail over their increasingly feeble attempts to communicate. As the train rolls northward, Harms repeatedly observes that feelings of isolation and loneliness are invading the group.(23) The result is that the remnant brotherhood community becomes disjoined. At the end of part one, Harms describes the degenerated state of their community: "We have little to say to each other. . . It's as though we have become disembodied from each other, become separate atoms floating alone and silent and aimless in a void."(24) This disassociation reflects what is, at bottom, the people's sense of estrangement from God which is the consequence of exile.

The landlessness of exile for these Mennonites is more than dislocation. They are alienated from the land, which also means that they are alienated from the traditional structures of faith and alienated from the very center from which all meaning evolves. Hence, faith and all traditional perceptions of reality are cast into doubt.

Harder provides a striking example of the extent to which perceptions of reality have become unreliable for the exiles. As the group plods through the final stretch of forest leading to their destination, Harms describes his own state of being: "I am overcome by

a curious feeling of unreality, as though any moment now we will all, horses and people, stop moving and stand here like trees, frozen forever into weird shapes of arctic petrification.(25)

First of all, the above passage indicates the depth of Harms' feelings of alienation; i.e., he is overcome by a feeling of unreality.(26) That life is now unreal for Harms indicates that he has become so estranged from the present, his past, his God, and his brethren that nothing of what he knows as real or meaningful remains in his life. The form his imagination gives to those feelings of unreality is of life simply freezing solid.

As he continues along the trail, Harms confronts the very embodiment of his thought: ". . . the sight of a snow-covered rig which with horse and driver had been buried in this boundless graveyard of ice and snow."(27) So what Harms imagines as unreality is suddenly present before him as a startling actuality. By this device, Harder effectively indicates the extent to which meaning has become confused. That which Harms imagines as a portrayal of "unreality" is suddenly before him as reality. Thus, the parameters of his world view are proven untrustworthy.

Even after the group of exiles has settled in their new location and developed a daily routine, they find little consolation for their confusion and insecurity. The hostile and barren forest environment

continues to oppress them. Life is a daily struggle against cold, hunger, and exhaustion. Moreover, their style of life--now without the freedom and privacy they had come to take for granted in the old colony--fosters continued feelings of estrangement from reality.

Essentially, the Mennonites' life in the taiga is dominated by weariness. Harder repeatedly employs this and other synonymous terms when describing the state of existence for these people.(28) The term, I think, can be interpreted in two ways. In one context, the term refers to the purely physical fatigue the exiles suffer due to strenuous labor and insufficient nourishment. In another context, the term refers to a general state of the soul.

Brueggemann, in discussing the nature of exile for the Israelites, writes:

The context of exile suggests that weariness is an experience of the collapse of everything secure and precious, the jeopardizing of one's historical identity, submission to forces and powers which are hostile or at least indifferent and the absence of any support or assurance of rescue.(29)

This passage reiterates the insecurity inherent in life after the end of history, and is also an accurate assessment of the quality of existence for the exiles in Harder's novel.

As previously noted, the nature of land-loss necessarily involves the collapse of all things secure and precious. Land, material goods, community, church, and family were among those things that collapsed with

land-loss. Historical identity, based upon the traditions of faith and culture that comprise the parameters of reality/meaning in existence, is confused. Discontinuity between past and present worlds fractures the solidarity upon which historical identity depends. Furthermore, the Mennonites are prisoners, forced to submit to the hostile Soviet authority of Fur Cap and his guards. They are also so isolated from the larger world that whichever human powers might be in a position to assist the exiles, do not even know of their plight.(30) And lastly, the possibility of rescue is as unlikely as weekly rest days.(31)

Weariness as a state of the soul is the cumulative effect of all the factors mentioned above, which combine to create a condition of life that is radically insecure. Weariness defines the nature of existence in a place of chaos. Thus, for the Mennonites in exile, life is basically without meaning.

However, these people have not relinquished their desire to survive.(32) How, then, is life lived and faith maintained in the landlessness of exile? Where do the people turn to fill the void of meaningless existence?

In our exemplary story of the Bible, the Israelites in Babylon maintain a meaningful identity by clinging to the identity/reality of their past; i.e., by remembering:

It is in the context of exile that Israel told its best stories. . . . Israel went back into its memories, to the time when the history-making,

history-summoning words were spoken which gave Israel enduring identity. . . . Israel told stories of rootage and belonging. It recited genealogies. . . . The stories prevent Israel from accepting the identity Babylon would bestow . . . (33)

The Mennonites, too, turn to remembered reality to fill their present emptiness. Harms relates: "My memory is as full as my stomach is empty." (34) The form of their remembering is twofold. Harms and his friends often converse about their old way of life and in this way re-connect themselves to their history and historical identity. Secondly, in their struggle to avoid the apathy and despair of a life of total meaninglessness, the exiles reenact traditions. They rely on the traditions of landed existence to bolster faith now, as they had always done in the past, expecting that some outward continuity with the past would provide them with meaningful structures in the present.

Ohm Peters' worship services, for example, are a conscious attempt to provide spiritual nourishment by appeal to tradition. The content of the services follows a time-honoured pattern: a reading from the Bible, words from the leader, songs remembered from the old world, and prayer. The Christmas celebration, in particular, represents a classic example of meaning and identity derived from tradition. The familiar Christmas carol, Bible reading, and closing prayer, along with a decorated evergreen and gifts for everyone all reenact a ritual from their faith tradition that effectively rekindles community spirit and enlivens weary souls. (35)

Ohm Peters himself is a symbolic link to landed existence. Harms tells us: "More than anyone, he is our link with the world we once lived in, felt comfortable in." (36) Peters, together with the Orthodox priest, Father Nikolai, represent archetypal men of faith in the novel. They are representatives of a religious world once known, but that is now no longer in existence. (37) As such, these men are symbols of continuity and strength and are depended upon by the others for consolation and reassurance. (38)

The Mennonites' faith connection to an agricultural way of life is not forgotten either. Harms, Wolff, Tielmann, and Koehn regularly wander to nearby grain fields on their rest days. (39) On one occasion, Koehn whittles himself a walking stick, explaining: "'It's to help me recapture the feeling of being back in the village again on a lazy Sunday afternoon looking over the young crops.'" (40) For the other men as well, the presence of fields instead of forest revivifies memories of the past, thereby fortifying their own historical identity.

The community garden serves much the same purpose. As previously noted, working the land was considered by many Mennonites to be a sacred as well as a traditional vocation. (41) So the act of planting a garden reenacts both their agricultural tradition and their faith tradition which, in turn, reinforces their historical

identity and sense of rootage.

That the activity of growing a garden effects spiritual rejuvenation is obvious in the reactions of the exiles. The women sing as they plant and weed, and every day the forest workers walk by to check the garden's progress.(42) In these ways, the Mennonites of No Strangers in Exile seek to fill the void that is landlessness by turning to the land, the soil, for hope and meaning.

The depth of the people's continued identification with cultivating the land becomes particularly evident through Wolff's reaction to the idea of a garden. He comments: "'May one be permitted to ask for how long a period this model farm is to operate? In the end you may create a rustic paradise here you won't want to leave.'"(43) His statement is an ironic allusion to the Mennonites' historical success of creating paradise from wilderness, and also illuminates the people's desperation to build some structure of meaning/identity through continuity with the past.

The theme of hope derived from new life in the land recurs with the coming of spring. Harms is affected with ". . . a feeling of excitement, a singing in the blood . . . [as] frost-stunned nature begins to stir and stretch."(44) The activities of spring renewal in nature, like those of cultivating the land, reflect new life back into the weary souls of those who have survived the deadening winter. The spectacular drama of spring

break-up on the Mezen River, in particular, revitalizes spirits. Harms describes his response to the event: "We feel emotionally purged by this exuberant, reckless display of primitive power, by this extravagant promise of the coming of spring and of renewed life even in the midst of this wintry desolation."(45)

That strength and hope can come from activities in nature can be seen, in one respect, as an outgrowth of the people's historical, agricultural tie to the land. As farmers they would naturally develop a keen awareness of seasonal change. It is a reality of the past now evident in the present. But the cycle of the seasons also signifies the presence of a controlling power beyond human reach. Following the event of break-up on the river, Harms expresses this very thought: "We may be prisoners here, but even Fur Cap and the State cannot control the cyclical movement of the seasons. . . . we are all . . . equally helpless in the face of an everchanging world whose natural rhythms are controlled by a higher power than any that man can muster."(46) New life in nature signifies a presence of God in the land; He has not after all abandoned them to eternal winter. In this way, the arrival of spring acts as a kind of reassurance of life, and therefore as a source of support for hope and faith.

To briefly summarize the role of land in the lives of the exiles, we can see that it acts in two ways as a source for structuring meaning. Cultivated land

links the people to their agricultural tradition, while the power revealed in nature itself gives them reassurance of God's abiding presence in the world he has created. Both of these appeals to the land help to fill the void of meaninglessness for the exiles by effecting a sense of continuity amidst discontinuity.

In addition to religious services and the land, there are other appeals to tradition evident in No Strangers in Exile. The practice of writing "begging letters," besides being a bold attempt to prevent starvation, can be seen as yet another attempt of the people to link up with their past. Although most of the exiles have no family or relations in Germany, the fact that their historical roots lie in that country is sufficient reason for them to communicate.(47) In light of this fact, the letters represent an appeal to the consanguineous Mennonite brotherhood. The family was/is a central structure of Mennonite society, and like the church, is a symbol of the kingdom of God extending to include not only members of one's local church, but all Mennonite people.(48) In this context, the letter writing becomes an attempt to bolster historical identity through identification with the ecclesiastical family that is the Mennonite brotherhood.

Furthermore, Alexander Harms' escape attempt follows the Mennonite tradition of hope for new life on new land that we observed in A Russian Dance of Death; while Waldemar Wolff seeks strength in the more sedentary

tradition of marriage. Wolff's justification for the action accurately summarizes the reason behind all of the appeal to tradition heretofore presented. Wolff explains:

"I need . . . to soothe the weariness in my soul. . . . I cling to life and act as though it means something when I know it doesn't. I persuade myself we can follow a normal routine here - work for our daily bread, have social intercourse, and even maintain some semblance of spiritual life. It's all different from before, of course, but it's all here. The dying is here too, different from before. And if death why not marriage, different from before? That's part of the pattern too."(49)

The pattern Wolff refers to is the pattern of life known in landed existence. His marriage, along with the exiles' memories, the worship services the garden, the walks to the fields, the letters, and the escape attempt all represent the exiles' various attempts to structure the chaos of landless existence into the secure and meaningful order of their past lifestyle. Even the graveyard--place where the pattern ends--is located in a birch grove, just as it had been in the old colony of Mariental.(50)

Something else each of these attempts has in common is their failure to effectively sustain hope and faith. Appeal to outward consistency with the past brings only short-lived relief to the exiles. Memories haunt and torment as much as they comfort.(51) And regarding religious worship, Harms relates:

The utter meaninglessness of our daily routine has a deadening effect on our spiritual lives. The flashes of hope we derive from our primitive worship services are growing weaker and less frequent. More and more we are succumbing to the sin of apathy.(52)

The men's peace of mind, gleaned from walking in the grain fields, is abruptly shattered when they encounter the distressing sight of a small child lying dead amidst the stalks of grain.(53) Likewise, death prevails in the garden. The new shoots become frostbitten and lifeless, thus defeating the people's hope.(54) The exuberance of spring fever also dies: "Yes, our resilient spring mood of a month ago is gone. The bouyancy we felt then was based on the false assumption that we could share in nature's annual spring renewal."(55)

The "begging letters," although very successful for a time, suddenly come to a halt when the camp commander decides that they contain "counter-revolutionary reports."(56) Finally, Harms' escape attempt is a failure, and Wolff's bride dies shortly after the wedding ceremony.(57)

Every attempt by the exiles to make existence somehow meaningful is thwarted by the hostility of the environment. Such continual defeat has its own eventual effect on the souls of the exiles, i.e., moral depravity. Theresa Preuss trades her family honour for life in the Soviet Command Post as mistress and secretary to Fur Cap.(58)

A more striking example of defection is the suicide of Hans Neufeld, who is characterized in the novel after the Biblical figure of Judas.(59) First, Neufeld betrays his comrades for a sack of flour (60), and then outrightly forsakes his God. In a violent flair of

temper, he declares:

"What God? Where is he in this freezing hell? Call yourselves Christians--you smug hypocrites? When we still had our thousand acres we were all fine Christians--at least on Sundays. That bull shit is over now--for good! Bread, that's our Jesus here!"(61)

Neufeld is another example of one whose faith depended too much on the outward structures of landed existence or the institutional aspect of Mennonite religious life. He has no inner strength. Now that he has lost the thousand acres, he also loses his faith. Moreover, in making bread the instrument of his salvation, he exists perpetually unfulfilled; for bread never satisfies an exile's hunger.(62) Ironically, Neufeld calls his neighbors hypocrites, but it is clear to everyone present that the real hypocrite is the one who is throwing stones. Neufeld's suicide by hanging, besides being the fulfillment of his role as a Judas figure, is the expression of a man whose soul is already dead. Neufeld's despair is total. Through the character of Neufeld, Harder also illuminates the dangers involved when faith becomes too closely integrated with the outward material world; and in this respect, Neufeld is, perhaps, a victim of his society.

As the story continues, the pervasive conditions of hunger, disease, and death increasingly breed feelings of futility and apathy among the survivors. Harms narrates: "The air of defeat in the barrack is almost palpable. I sense that these people have abandoned

hope, they are simply going through the motions of living as they await their inevitable end."(63)

The Word of God seems to remain a silent ambiguity, not speaking through the traditions of old. The struggle to nourish faith through the perpetuation of historical identity has failed. Life continues in a void of meaninglessness and hopelessness. Wolff's nighttime plea to God reveals the extent to which despair has overwhelmed hope. While still asleep, Wolff breaks forth in a feverish outburst of disjointed quotations from Revelations 6. Before falling back onto his bunk in anguished sobs, he quotes a final line: ". . . sacred . . . Lord . . . how long wilt . . . judge and not . . . avenge . . . our blood . . . against those . . . dwell on . . . earth . . . ?'"(64) Harms, similarly, expresses his feelings of utter futility about the reign of death in the community: "Our birch grove cemetery is becoming the central symbol of our experience here. No matter how hard we struggle, the birches will have us in the end."(65)

Despair and death appear to be the inevitable ends for the exiled Mennonites. However, at the end of the novel a theme of redemption emerges from what seems a hopeless situation. When the exiles are utterly disconsolate, three of the survivors--Harms, Koehn, and Wolff--experience a spiritual enlightenment. They discover, in "peace and resignation," a new voice of God.(66)

Although this change comes as somewhat of an

about face in the novel, it is not an inappropriate or contrived ending. Rather, it is the radical way of survival in the landlessness of exile. The Israelites in Babylon experience the same kind of reversal.

Brueggemann determines that it is to the lost and homeless in exile that God issues a new promise; i.e., a promise of the beginning of a new history that will culminate in restoration to the land.(67) Brueggemann refers to the new history as a "reversal of destiny."(68)

However, for the Israelites, the nature of this reversal is more than an inner change of spirit or renewed faith. Brueggemann writes: ". . . it is the radical transformation of an historical, political situation."(69) The words of the prophets promise a return to Jerusalem.(70) In this respect, Brueggemann's biblical analysis cannot inform us about the situation of the exiles in Harder's novel.(71) Harms, Koehn, and Wolff will never see their homeland again. Nevertheless, what is significantly relevant is the circumstance out of which the reversal of destiny is born. Writes Brueggemann: "Things which seem hopelessly lost, closed, and dead are the very region of God's new action."(72)

The above words clearly suggest resurrection imagery. Out of death, God inaugurates new life. Brueggemann himself associates the crucifixion/resurrection of Jesus Christ with the motif of resurrection in the new promise to Israel:

In the Old Testament the resurrection motif is

undoubtedly expressed as the call to exiles to leave exile and return to the land.

Thus crucifixion/resurrection echoes the dialectic of possessed land lost/exiles en route to the land of promise. (73)

The passage confirms the notion that the beginning of new history for the exiled Israelites is indeed a resurrection experience.

Now if one were to perceive the notion of new history as a reversal of destiny couched in resurrection imagery, the events at the conclusion of No Strangers in Exile also indicate the inauguration of new history. For, in effect, the spiritual enlightenment experienced by Harms, Koehn, and Wolff involves a reversal of destiny in terms of their self-perception and world view, and a resurrection in terms of the spiritual condition out of which those perceptions grow. As Harms concludes: ". . . true spiritual liberty could come only after we had become nothing." (74)

An interpretation of Harms' words, "become nothing," will explain how their experience is indeed a resurrection. Basically, the words must be understood in connection with the idea of spiritual resignation. In the characters of Ohm Peters and Father Nikolai, Harder portrays the nature of life lived in resignation. These men do not struggle with despondency like the other exiles. They live in the certainty that God has not abandoned the people of exile. Moreover, they are firm in their commitment that only God can provide the necessary food for survival in the extreme conditions of the labor

camp. For example, Ohm Peters responds to Hans Neufeld's defection with these words:

"None of us has the strength to stave off despair without God's help. Let us remember that. He is there, in spite of everything. In our situation here we have all been led to the far edge of suffering and desperation--to the point where we either give up in despair or give in to Him."(75)

Giving in to God is the way Ohm Peters and Father Nikolai live their lives, and it is this act to which the idea of resignation refers. On the occasion of the first funeral in the camp, Ohm Peters describes more explicitly what it means to become resigned:

"There is another form of dying, according to the Apostle, that is even more bitter than physical death. . . . And that is a death in which a man, of his own free will, renounces this life within himself. Doing that is to suffer an inner death very different from the one we all must suffer here below. . . . And this inner death in conjunction with Christ now becomes another life, a freshly granted life."(76)

The idea Ohm Peters expresses is not new or original. Harder is simply restating a principle that lies at the heart of Christian faith--the self dies to rise again in Christ.(77) Thus, "becoming nothing" refers to death of the self or self-will. Moreover, it is foremostly a resurrection experience; a symbolic participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

So the motif of crucifixion/resurrection is present in both the new promise to the exiled Israelites and the experience of becoming resigned for the exiled Mennonites. Therefore, in the context of resurrection imagery, the spiritual enlightenment of Harms, Koehn, and Wolff indicates the beginning of new history.

The death of the self, for Harms in particular, is a gradual process that runs as a theme throughout the novel. First, he exhausts all the possibilities of tradition and historical continuity before giving up. He clings to what was real/meaningful in the past. As we have seen, each of these archaic structures fail to bolster his weakened spirit. Simultaneously, Harms experiences a gradual reversal of his feelings of alienation. There is a progressive perception of the old world as unreality and the new as reality. The process becomes complete at the end of the novel when Wolff affirms that

Camp 513 is indeed a "real world"--that God is present and meaning exists, Camp 513 is home.(78)

One of the first indications of Harms' shifting perspective is the occasion of the Orthodox Easter celebration in the forest. He comes away from the event with these thoughts: "I feel exhausted, but cleansed and bouyant in my soul. A Mennonite celebrating an Orthodox Easter mass at night in the middle of the northern forest! And why not? This is my reality now; Mariental is a fading dream."(79)

As summer turns to fall, more and more of the historical continuities in his life fade like his memories of the old colony. For example, evening conversations are conducted in Russian instead of German. Harms concludes: "German seems less appropriate to our circumstances."(80) Furthermore, the Mennonites no longer communicate with

their brethren in Germany.(81) Harms even expresses a preference to not receive letters from his own family.(82) That Wolff, too, is breaking with the past is clearly evident on the occasion when Harms offers to Wolff a recently received letter from Mariental. Wolff responds by waving it off and focusing his attention instead on a copy of the Russian newspaper "Pravda."(83) The action clearly indicates that his focus of reality is not the Mennonite past but the Russian present.

Lastly, the survivors lose their spiritual leaders. Ohm Peters, symbolic link to the old Mennonite world, returns to Mariental; and shortly thereafter, Father Nikolai dies from an axeblow to the head.(84) The departure of these men, as archetypal men of faith and symbols of a religious world of the past, signifies the loss of the religious element of historical continuity in the community.

Significantly, Ohm Peters' last gesture before leaving the camp is to pass his tattered Bible on to Harms with these words:

"Alexander, we've gone beyond pious talk in this place. We need more than bread here. Only God can be our staff of life in this horrid camp. . . . You saw how it [Bible] was torn apart once, but it's still a living whole, as God is a living whole."(85)

In the end, then, the three men, Harms, Koehn, and Wolff, are left with themselves and the "living Word." All traces of their historical identity have been wiped away--including the faith of the fathers. Alone with the Word of God, they have become nothing. And it is

in this condition that their despair becomes resignation. As we shall see, from nothingness the three men experience resurrection into a new life. I quote Harms at length:

Time no longer seems to matter much to any of us. We survive, but we feel neither hope nor despair. On a gentle day in August we go for a long walk and sit in the sun on the edge of the forest. . . . Wolff suddenly stops humming. He gets up and takes a few stiff steps forward. He is like a man in a trance.

"In case somebody should ever . . . after us," he mutters and points to the west, his dark eyes still searching beyond the trees. "God in his mercy grant that our world beyond the frozen Mezen be remembered as a real world with ordinary, decent, suffering, and praying people in it. Let them know there was a Camp Number 513 here, and a Barrack Number seven containing people who lived and loved and hoped in the midst of despair--as long as they could.

"It was all so senseless. Many of us fell from despair to apathy to nothing. But there were those--Waldemar Wolff of Saratov for one, and Peter Koehn of Mariental for another, and Alexander Harms for a third--who in spite of bitter afflictions, in the end found in the brutal forests of Archangel peace and resignation. . . ."

Peace and resignation! Wolff is right, of course. If our suffering here has any meaning at all it is that we have gone beyond hatred and love to a spiritual condition that surpasses all understanding. In spite of everything we are at peace here amidst God's immortal, unspeaking green sentinels of the taiga. . . . For nothingness triumphant, let us pray in peace to God. (86)

So the new life these men attain to is characterized by the recognition of Camp 513 as a real world, their home, and a new spiritual strength to be at peace in that world.

Harry Loewen describes the home Harms comes to recognize, as a spiritual home. (87) One can, I think, interpret the meaning of "spiritual home" in two ways. First, it can refer strictly to the spiritual enlightenment Harms experiences. Through spiritual

liberty he has attained peace of mind, which in itself is a kind of home of the soul. Second, the term could refer to the idea of home as spiritual in the sense that Harms has a new understanding of home not identified with the history of landed existence or of the land itself. Harder himself foreshadows this conclusion early in the novel.

While suspended in the void of train motion, Alexander Harms recalls his own introduction to the term "homeland." He is a small boy standing over the graves of his ancestors, his tiny hand grasping the huge forefinger of his grandfather:

"Russia is our way . . . our long way," Grandfather says loudly. "That is what my father used to say, and his father before him. By the 'way' they meant the Anabaptist way of life handed down to us by our forefathers and by God's Word in the New Testament. Never forget that Sasha. Our people came here a long time ago--over a hundred years ago. And still we are only guests in this land. This is our home for now, but it can never be our homeland."(88)

Then later, as Alexander Harms, now a grown man, plods through the deep snow towards the yet unknown destination of his exile, he thinks to himself:

Russia will cease to be a 'way' for us and will become our 'home' at last--our final home here on earth.(89)

By these passages, Harder effectively illuminates the discontinuity of faith and history that eventually occurs at the end of the novel. The grandfather's statement expresses the self-understanding of the Mennonite people during the time of landed history. Basically, they regarded themselves as pilgrims as opposed to citizens of Russia. The "Anabaptist way" refers to

their religious commitment to live a way of non-conformity to the world. As a result of this commitment, the Mennonites lived in isolated, agricultural Mennonite colonies, uncommunicative with Russia's people and untouched by their culture. Thus, "home" denoted ethnically separated colonies of Mennonites living according to traditions that encouraged exclusivity and close ties to the land--but never Russia herself.

In contrast, as Harms predicts, Russia at last becomes home. His new perception of Camp 513 as home, however, is one in which ethnicity and land play no part. There is no hope of returning to the land that was his boyhood home, and both ethnicity and the traditions of ethnic identity have been dissolved in oppression. Russians and Mennonites together form a brotherhood of exiles with the Word of God to feed their mutual hunger. It is to this principle that the title of the book alludes--there are no strangers in exile. The idea stands in sharp contrast to the Mennonites' historical practice of isolation from the larger world.(90)

Understood in this way, the idea of spiritual home conforms with the spiritual nature of the exiles' resurrection experience. Through the spiritual transformation from despair to resignation, Harms, Koehn, and Wolff are born into a new life with a new historical identity and a new faith. Their perception of reality (God, self, world) has made a complete reversal. In this respect, destiny has been reversed and new history born.

III.

We have seen that for both the Mennonites in No Strangers in Exile and the Israelites in Brueggemann's analysis, the experience of exile is the experience of the end of landed history followed by a history of landlessness that culminates in resurrection into a new history. The end of history in the land is characterized by a complete discontinuity of environment that fosters feelings of alienation and meaninglessness, unreality and weariness.

Furthermore, both Mennonites and Israelites respond to the void created by landlessness by attempting to transpose the structures of meaning from their past world into the present. They rely on the traditions that once formed their reality to bridge the discontinuity between the past and present. In so doing, they seek to reaffirm their historical identity and so gain some sense of meaning in their existence.

As we have seen in No Strangers in Exile, all of these attempts fail. Only after the old world is relinquished does meaning re-emerge in the lives of the exiles. Harms, Wolff, and Koehn surrender their historical Mennonite identity and, out of that death, are resurrected into new life. Their new life involves a new self-understanding, a new faith, and a new world view not identified with the land or the ethnic traditions of

landed existence. In this respect, the three men discover a spiritual home which concurrently signifies the birth of new history.

Thus in the condition of landlessness we witness a complete break with identification with the land. Throughout the novel, there is a progressive movement away from the outward traditional realities of the old colony toward a new spiritual reality. "Home" becomes a place with God where Mennonites and Russians together find rest. To conclude, then, the problems of alienation and unreality caused by loss of land are overcome by accepting that loss in resignation to God in faith; from that self-surrender comes resurrection into new life with a new understanding of home.

In light of this conclusion, Harder's novel, aside from presenting the horrors of labor camp existence, contains a message about Mennonite Christianity. In the characters of Ohm Peters and Father Nikolai, Harder presents his ideal of Christian faith and life. These men live in faithful self-surrender to God. At the conclusion of the novel, the three survivors discover this same kind of peaceful resignation; while, the suicide of Hans Neufeld represents the opposite extreme. Through these characters and events, Harder presents a view of Christian faith that is more existential than the ethnic, insitutional faith of traditional Russian Mennonitism. For Harder, living a Christian life does not require the stuff of historical identity such as land, material

wealth, community traditions, or isolated ethnic colonies. Rather, a Christian needs only the living Word of God. Moreover, the Word of God is available to all people; God does not make ethnic distinctions.

Herein lies the element of universality in Harder's novel. Speaking generally, the human condition is never without suffering and meaninglessness. These problems are overcome by resignation in faith. The true Christian life of faith is lived in personal confrontation with the Word of God, and in surrender of the self to that Word. Faith is a matter of inner change in the individual spirit. In this sense, Harder calls for a radical departure from the communally held religious values evident in the landed Mennonite colonies of Pre-Revolution times.

It must be noted here that Harder's essential message about Christian faith is contrary to Brueggemann's. Whereas Harder advocates an individualistic, spirit-centered view of Christianity, Brueggemann maintains that Christian faith is lived embedded in history, community, and place in the land.(91) Now, although further discussion of this seeming incongruity occurs in subsequent chapters of this thesis, to determine the validity or accuracy of each of these theories is not within the scope of this study.(92) Rather, our attention should focus on the correlation of histories in relation to the land and its effect on the faith of the Mennonites.

Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites' experience serves as a pattern by which to identify the Mennonites' situation in relation to the land. Since the pattern of historical circumstances in Harder's novel corresponds with Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites, we can view the Mennonites' experience of exile in terms of Brueggemann's pattern of historical movement regarding the land. The Mennonites experience landlessness after the end of history in the land. And then, through an act of resurrection, new history is inaugurated. What this points to regarding the relation of land and faith for the Mennonites in Harder's novel is that with the end of land and no promise of return, their traditionally land-oriented faith also suffers demise. When faith is restored, it is a new faith unconnected to the land.

NOTES

1. For a complete story of this period of Mennonite history see John B. Toews, Czars, Soviets and Mennonites (Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982).
2. For more information see Ibid. and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956, 4 vols., trans. by Thomas Whitney (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973-1975).
3. Al Reimer, introduction to No Strangers in Exile (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1979), p.1.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 90-129.
6. Ibid., p. 9.
7. The character of Liese is the creative addition of Al Reimer.
8. Hans Harder, No Strangers in Exile, trans. Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1979), p. 14.
9. Ibid.
10. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 17-20.
11. Harder, Strangers, pp. 5-10.
12. Ibid., p. 9.
13. Ibid., p. 11.
14. Ibid., p. 13.
15. Ibid., p. 32.
16. Ibid., pp. 10-11, 12, 14-15, 25.
17. Ibid., p. 25.
18. Brueggemann, Land, p. 29.
19. Walter Brueggemann, "Weariness, Exile, Chaos," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34 (1972): 33, 34.

20. Harder, Strangers, p. 117.
21. Brueggemann, Land, p. 130.
22. Robert Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1979), pp. 119-130.
23. Harder, Strangers, pp. 15, 16, 25, 27, 29.
24. Ibid., p. 29.
25. Ibid., p. 28.
26. Recalling Eliade's distinction between chaos and cosmos--it is cosmos, the place where God is present and meaning exists that is "real"--reality and meaning are co-terminous. See chapter one of this thesis.
27. Harder, Strangers, p. 29.
28. Ibid., pp. 15, 29, 37, 44, 83, 89, 92, 98, 100,
103.
29. Brueggemann, "Weariness, Exile, Chaos," p. 33.
30. Harder, Strangers, p. 39.
31. Ibid., p. 48.
32. Ibid., pp. 29, 83.
33. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 144-145.
34. Harder, Strangers, p. 15.
35. Ibid., pp. 42, 44-46.
36. Ibid., p. 10.
37. Ibid., pp. 65, 109.
38. Ibid., pp. 10, 51-54, 64-65.
39. Ibid., pp. 60-61, 65-66, 122.
40. Ibid., p. 61.
41. See chapter one of this study.
42. Harder, Strangers, pp. 58, 64.
43. Ibid., p. 57.
44. Ibid., p. 55.

45. Ibid., p. 56.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., pp. 39, 51, 52.
48. Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), p. 498.
49. Harder, Strangers, p. 83.
50. Ibid., pp. 15-16, 81.
51. Ibid., pp. 14, 61-62, 72, 108-109.
52. Ibid., p. 58.
53. Ibid., pp. 65-66.
54. Ibid., p. 60.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., p. 120.
57. Ibid., p. 104.
58. Ibid., pp. 75-80.
59. Ibid., pp. 86, 106.
60. Ibid., pp. 85, 86.
61. Ibid., p. 105.
62. Ibid., p. 65.
63. Ibid., p. 105.
64. Ibid., p. 116.
65. Ibid., p. 113.
66. Ibid., pp. 123, epilogue. In making this claim, I am drawing partially on the German version of the novel wherein Wolff comes to recognize "God" at the conclusion.
67. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 133-150.
68. Ibid., p. 134.
69. Ibid.
70. We read of the promise of restoration in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and II Isaiah. See Ibid., pp. 130-150,

181.

71. Walter Brueggemann, in referring to the new history strictly in terms of political events, perhaps overstates his case; especially in light of the facts that the Israelites maintain their identity in Babylon by remembering, and that new promise of return to the land is meaningful for Israel only in the context of having once had the land and losing it. In a sense, the new promise and the renewal it elicits is as much a psychological and spiritual reversal as it is a political event.

72. Brueggemann, Land, p. 133.

73. Ibid., p. 180.

74. Harder, Strangers, epilogue.

75. Ibid., p. 106.

76. Ibid., p. 82.

77. See Romans 6:1-15.

78. Harder, Strangers, p. 123.

79. Ibid., p. 55.

80. Ibid., p. 114.

81. Ibid., p. 120.

82. Ibid., p. 119.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid., pp. 117, 121.

85. Ibid., pp. 117, 118.

86. Ibid., pp. 122-epilogue.

87. Harry Loewen, "Canadian Mennonite Literature: Longing for a Lost Homeland," in The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-speaking Canadians (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 73f.

88. Harder, Strangers pp. 15, 16.

89. Ibid., p. 27.

90. It is interesting to compare the writings of Hans Harder and Dietrich Neufeld on this point. You recall that Neufeld writes that while the Mennonites still maintained a tentative hold on their land, their mutual

suffering failed to resolve the social disparities among them. Yet in the landlessness of exile, with all hope of land removed, mutual suffering, indeed, equalizes humanity.

91. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 186, 187.

92. These two divergent viewpoints encapsulate an entire theological debate over the nature of New Testament and Old Testament faith and covenant.

CHAPTER FOUR

Peace Shall Destroy Many

I.

Rudy Wiebe, a Canadian Mennonite, is perhaps more keenly aware of the influence of land in shaping human identity than any other author included in this study. All of his novels address issues dealing with the relationship between land and its inhabitants.(1) Wiebe's attention to the topic is a direct outgrowth of his own early life. He spent much of his childhood wandering in the bushland of Northern Saskatchewan, unaware until adulthood that others with names like Big Bear and Wandering Spirit roamed that turf before Mennonites settled there.(2) His indignation at this discovery provided the necessary impetus to launch his literary career.(3)

Another facet of Wiebe's childhood is also sustained in his writings; i.e., his faith. Wiebe was raised a Mennonite and affirms the faith of his tradition.(4) His two Mennonite novels, Peace Shall Destroy Many and The Blue Mountains of China, deal directly with his own Mennonite past and Anabaptist faith.

His more recent novel, My Lovely Enemy, is also a Mennonite novel, but in a less directly historical sense. Reviewer Sam Solecki writes that Wiebe's non-Mennonite novels do not represent a break from the issues addressed in the Mennonite novels. At base, all of his stories include "a sense of community predicated on a religious attitude to life." (5) Thus, religion and history comprise two significant elements in all of Wiebe's novels.

Wiebe's first novel, Peace Shall Destroy Many, contains much evidence of the two aforementioned generative influences. The novel is primarily the story of a young man's search for identity and understanding. A "Bildungsroman," the novel portrays Thom Wiens' maturation from naiveté to enlightenment in quest of the true nature of Anabaptist/Mennonite faith. In juxtaposition, Wiebe presents the character of Deacon Block--the powerful leader of the community. As much as the novel deals with Thom's growth, it simultaneously involves the destruction of Block. Through these two main characters, Wiebe explores the positive and negative possibilities of Mennonite faith and tradition. The main action and conflict highlights the dialectically related themes of true faith and its distortion by tradition, of war and non-violence, and of brotherly love and separation from the world. Through the voices of his characters, Wiebe, quite didactically at times, presents his vision of true Anabaptist Christianity regarding these themes.

The setting for the novel is the North

Saskatchewan wilderness. Developing the idea that to settle a land is to create a world, Wiebe uses the wilderness setting to explore what kind of world can be created there.(6) Conflict between the older and younger generations serves as a context in which he demonstrates how a microcosm like Wapiti holds potential for the creation of both a paradise and a prison.(7) In connection with this idea, one can observe a correspondence between ways in which the two generations perceive the land and world of Wapiti, and their own spiritual state. The associations illuminate the role of interaction between land and people in shaping faith. The second section of this chapter will focus on this relationship.

Wiebe also reinforces the interrelation of land and faith by his use of land imagery. Images of the land often denote the spiritual state of the characters. By so employing land imagery, Wiebe demonstrates the integration that occurs between a people and the land they inhabit. Section three of this chapter will explore this function of land imagery.

It must also be noted that Peace Shall Destroy Many is in several ways analagous to the Old Testament story of land and its inhabitants. To explain and support the Biblical identification, I will again refer to Walter Brueggemann's text, The Land. Generally, the characters and events in Peace Shall Destroy Many demonstrate Brueggemann's gift/grasp dialectic in relation

to the land.(8) The one who grasps the land, loses it; while, the one who grasps the Word is given all. Moreover, the character types who enact this drama are often analagous to the Biblical character types who fulfill the same roles. More specific reference will occur throughout the body of section two of this chapter.

II.

The community of Wapiti is made up of a gathering of Mennonites who suffered the destruction of their world in the Russian Revolution and have emigrated to Canada in the hope of rebuilding their lives. The community is fourteen years old and is prosperous with second generation children. In contrast to the books discussed in the previous two chapters of this thesis wherein the people were made landless, the people of Wapiti are essentially landed. That is, they are securely in possession of land and have developed a sense of home. In chapter two of this thesis we observed how having land influenced the faith of the Mennonites in Russia. In this chapter, I will explore how having land shapes the faith of the people of Wapiti.

In comparison to the works of Neufeld and Harder, on one hand, we can see a certain repetition of history. The character of Deacon Block repeats the folly of the landed Mennonites in Russia. He, too, allows his preoccupation with the land to take precedence over brotherly love. On the other hand, what is most obviously

different in Peace Shall Destroy Many is the lack of threat to life. The question of survival--food, clothing, shelter--is not an issue for the people of Wapiti. For example, the contingency of life that shakes the faith of Alexander Harms is foreign to this community at present. Contrarily, faith issues arise in Wapiti more from the ongoing nature of life. There exists in Wapiti a deep sense of continuity with the past and expectation of little change in the future. And it is this omnipotence of tradition that becomes the bane of existence between generations. Conflict over the role of tradition develops.(9) In conjunction with conflict over tradition, ways of perceiving the land differ between the older and younger people of Wapiti; and correspondingly, so does their understanding of Mennonite faith. Focusing mainly on the characters of Deacon Block and Thom Wiens, I shall explore how these perspectives differ.

Deacon Block regards the Saskatchewan wilderness as a place of opportunity. The isolated bushland was a perfect location for him to build a "colony of true Mennonites" such as his forefathers had known in Russia before the Revolution.(10) The first immigrant settlers, like Block, view the land as a place of promise on which they might recreate the peace and prosperity of Russia. But the Deacon harbors a unique motivation for desiring such a community. Feelings of guilt for the sin of murder he committed in Russia threaten to crush him.(11) Simultaneously, it drives him to ensure that his

only son will never be confronted by such temptation to evil.(12) His community would be both righteous and pure. The way he expects to achieve this end is by hiding the community in bush so dense that no evil can penetrate the barrier of isolation. To further ensure the sanctity of Wapiti, the Deacon establishes himself as a kingly figure reminiscent of the Mennonite landowners we met in connection with A Russian Dance of Death. He is also not unlike Solomon in the Old Testament, as we shall presently discover.

The role of king in Israel was born when the people were required to manage the land.(13) While wandering in the wilderness, the need for a king simply did not arise. It was only after the Israelites crossed the river Jordan and began their history of life as a landed people that a king became necessary. The role of king is peculiar to landedness. They are the ones appointed to manage the land according to God's word; i.e., to care for the land as God's gift. Walter Brueggemann defines the role of king in the Old Testament: "In the Bible, 'king' refers to those who presided over the organized life of Israel and so had responsibility for the land. . . . [And] . . . all people entrusted with power and authority to choose social ends and deploy resources for those ends."(14)

This description defines precisely the role of the Deacon in Wapiti. He appropriates land by buying out the English settlers in the district; he

establishes farms for his hand-picked immigrants; he conducts all of the community's external business and governmental affairs, including the purchase of modern machinery to increase the land's yield; and he dictates the moral, spiritual, and economic development of each community member's life. Later, when the neighboring Métis become a threat to the purity of his community, he expropriates their land and banishes them from the region.

The Deacon's will to achieve is excessive. His faith in God, on the other hand, is correspondingly weak. Deacon Block does not trust that God will provide. In fact, his lack of trusting faith is what led him into committing acts of violence and murder in Russia. Unlike his wife, who is opposite to Block in every respect, he cannot believe that "God will provide."⁽¹⁵⁾ In the same vein, he is incapable of perceiving the land as God's gift. He regards the land as his property to be controlled and manipulated in order to establish and preserve a secure environment. Only his own will and determination will procure the land and sustain him on it.

This character trait, in particular, casts the Deacon as a kingly figure like Solomon. Brueggemann describes Solomon in much the same way as I have just described Deacon Block. Solomon ruled the people of Israel during the time when they were secure in the land. Solomon, like Block, regarded the land as property to be managed, forgetting that God alone holds the land:

"Solomon is a king totally secure in his land which he got

for himself, totally committed to keeping his land on his own terms and insensitive to either the cry of his fellows or the gifts and claims of Yahweh."(16)

The culmination of Solomon's "grasper" attitude is the event of building the temple in Jerusalem. What was intended as a place of God's glory becomes a prison:

Yahweh is now cornered in the temple. His business is support of the regime, to grant legitimacy to it and to effect forgiveness for it as is necessary. The God who had given land and intended it to be handled as gift is now made patron of the king who now has the land. In the Solomonic period even God now apparently has no claim on the land. He is guest and not host. . . . The God of the temple is subordinated to the royal regime. It is no longer remembered in public Israel that he maintains his freedom and that the land is indeed and always his. Solomon, not Yahweh, is clearly in charge with only a few charitable nods in the direction of Yahweh.(17)

Brueggemann's description of Solomon's attitude further illuminates the kingly character of Deacon Block, for much the same attitude is discernible in Peace Shall Destroy Many. Deacon Block locates the church in the center of Wapiti, with all roads leading to that center.(18) When the youth hold a service at the lakeside, the Deacon responds with an admonition: "Church services, of whatever nature, belong in the house of God."(19) Similarly, the Deacon is wholly opposed to the Bible classes that the schoolteacher, Joseph Dueck, is conducting with the neighboring Indians. Deacon Block, like king Solomon, has removed God from the land and "cornered" Him in the church. The land belongs to him and he is clearly in charge--as King Solomon thought himself.

An outgrowth, perhaps, of Block's lack of sensitivity to land as gift, is his equally callous disregard of the history of the land prior to Mennonite settlement.(20) In settling the land, Block imposes his own history over it, as if the land of Canada has no story of its own. The experience of history from which people derive identity and destiny comes not from the land of Saskatchewan, but from Russia. All religious axioms and principles for righteous living are dictated to the community based on the Deacon's conviction that salvation is ensured as long as the ways of the Russian forefathers are maintained.(21) Such practices as maintenance of the German language (Block is the only adult who can speak English fluently), avoidance of any act of violence, non-participation in war, and isolation from the world all reflect the Deacon's adherence to a history from another land.

The faith of the people is likewise from the world of Russian Mennonite tradition and it is the same institutionalized religion of the landed colonies. Confrontation with God's Word in a moment of personal decision is unheard of in Wapiti. Rather, faith exists as another form of historical continuity. The Deacon states: "When, by the grace of God alone, we were able to escape the terror of Russia and come to Canada, we were as destitute as it is possible to be. We had nothing--only debts. Yet despite the Depression years, I know no one doubted but God would see us through. We all believed

that the faith of our fathers which had carried them across lands and seas was with us still."(22) The people of Wapiti understand themselves in the context of Russian Mennonite tradition and history, with the result that the land's own story and meaning suffer obliteration.

In a parallel way, the Word of God suffers obliteration. The Deacon's rules for managing the land do not come from the Bible. Instead, the Word of God is replaced by "the ordinances of the fathers," which he believes "found the right moral and spiritual action."(23) What he fails to recognize, however, is that traditions can become distorted without rootage in the Word from which they originate. In his preoccupation with managing the land, the Deacon forgets the Word of God entirely; and this too is a kingly trait.

Brueggemann attributes this same amnesia to King Solomon in relation to the land. Solomon forgets that God has given the land by His Word, and that His Word remains: "Land is held in relation to word. Land is lost without word. Even the king must learn that man (king) lives by word, not just by bread; by what is given and not by what is controlled."(24) Land must be managed with an ear to God's word. But in landedness the temptation is always to self-securing and ownership of the land. Both Solomon and Deacon Block succumb to that temptation. Their preoccupation with the land blinds them to the very values that the land is given them to protect.

Kings are even given warnings of the folly

of landholding. Prophets are sent to remind kings that God's word must not be disregarded. Moreover, Brueggemann asserts that it is precisely because of kings and land management that prophets appear:

The land and the illusion of self-sufficiency seduce and lull people into managing their lives and their land in ways that seem beyond the terrors of history. The prophet, by contrast, is Israel's single source of insight and guidance. He exists to affirm continually to Israel its precariousness and contingency in the face of more attractive but illegitimate alternatives. The prophet is intended precisely for speech (a) in the land, (b) in the face of the king, (c) against idolatrous forms of self-securing. (25)

Solomon is indeed warned by the prophet Ahijah, but Solomon pays no heed, as is the way of kings who own the land. (26) Finally, Solomon's failure to remember God's word ends in his downfall. (27)

In Peace Shall Destroy Many, the character of Joseph Dueck, the schoolteacher, fulfills the role of prophet. For the most part, Joseph is the author's mouthpiece regarding the nature of Christian obligation toward love and peace. (28) His voice is also a warning to the king that God's word should not be forgotten. At the church gathering where Joseph announces his decision to leave Wapiti to join the medical corps, he contradicts Block by announcing that the way of brotherly love is not through isolation but through positive action. In addition, he reminds Deacon Block that although the church of Wapiti professes to live an ethic of brotherly love and can send a missionary to India, their neighboring Indians and Métis have never known such love from the

Mennonites.(29) The Deacon, of course, in his kingly outrage rejects the message of the prophet. Like Solomon, he is convinced that the land is his to organize and manipulate.

In the same vein, it is the Deacon's failure to recognize the importance of what is given that eventually leads to his ruin. Although many of the older generation remain grateful to the Deacon for his leadership, the youth of Wapiti are not satisfied to live controlled by the Deacon's anachronistic rules. The paradise that the first settlers see in the Deacon's Wapiti becomes a prison for the young people. In the character of Thom Wiens, Wiebe presents the struggle of youth coming to terms with tradition and truth. In essence, Thom learns that he cannot live by bread, by controls. His search is the search for what is given--the Word of God.

In the opening chapter, Thom is a classic product of the Deacon's indoctrination. "The ways of the fathers" is Thom's answer to all questions of existence. Regarding livelihood, he believes it is his duty to "plow and subdue the earth" as his forefathers did before him, and he is conscious of his "ancestors' great tradition of building homes where only brute nature couched."(30) Disturbing thoughts about World War II and his own impending draft call often enter Thom's mind as he works in the field. But he always reminds himself that he must uphold "the faith of the fathers" and affirm that

participation in war is against his conscience.(31) Other tenets of his own faith exist in his mind by rote: ". . . if someone had asked him when he had first known that Christ bade his disciples love their enemies, he could no more have answered than if he had been asked to consciously recollect his first breath."(32) Lying in the open field, Thom wishes for yet greater isolation to insulate him from Hitler and the war. Thom thinks he loves the land and is secure and content in his place in the land.(33)

Thom, in accepting the ordinances of the community, has developed a faith and identity not his own; and, he relates to the land in the same indoctrinated way. The images are not his own or the lands. On the morning he rides out to the hay meadow, Thom attempts to relate to the land using the Christian/Jewish images of a hymn he sings in German.(34) The incongruity is glaring in contrast to the meadowlark's song.(35)

Later that same morning, Thom gets a glimpse of his own ignorance and a new awareness of the land begins to awaken in him. The discovery of a buffalo skull half-buried in the meadow sparks conjecture in Thom's mind:

"You know Pete, it's funny. There are stacks of European history books to read, yet the Indians . . . lived here for thousands of years, and we don't know a single thing that happened to them . . . A whole world lost. Not one remembered word of how generations upon generations lived and died."(36)

Thom's comments, here, inform us of his beginning

awareness about both the land and his own faith. Wiebe, himself, describes Thom's experience: "[Thom is becoming] . . . overwhelmingly aware of dragging with him a past from another time, another place, which does not help him confront where he is right now. . . . he has no memory . . . no words; no myth to help him truly understand the place." (37)

The buffalo skull is the cause of Thom's first awakening to the notion that the history which has shaped his faith and self-understanding is inadequate for life in the present. Existence begins to dominate over the traditions of history in Thom's mind. Recalling the omnipotence of tradition in Wapiti, the scene also acts as an indicator of the conflict that eventually develops between Thom and the Deacon. It is from this point onward in the novel that Thom's sense of the inadequacy of "the ordinances of the fathers" deepens and extends in regard to both the land and his own faith. Thom's continued correspondence with Joseph Dueck also fortifies Thom's dissatisfaction with the ways of the Deacon. The Deacon's controls become less and less sufficient; generational tension builds.

There are several key conflicts between Thom and the Deacon that finally toss Thom into a spiritual void. They all concern Thom's increasing doubt about the Deacon's practice of brotherly love in his handling of affairs in the community. First, he hears of the Deacon's slanderous treatment of the marriage of

Herman Paetkau and Madeleine Moosomin. Herman is expelled from the church for marrying a "breed," even though Madeleine is a Christian.(38) Second, Thom and the Deacon come to verbal blows over the Bible classes that Thom has taken over from Joseph. Deacon Block makes it clear to Thom that neither Métis nor Indians will ever be allowed into the church because they are, and always will be, unclean people. Then, as the discussion continues, Block bluntly informs Thom that he's wasting his time with his Bible classes because the "breeds" would all be bought out and moved away by spring; Block himself was making sure of it.(39) Third, Thom discovers the reasons for Elizabeth's death and finally comprehends the meaning of her plea to him to get out of Wapiti. Block's strictness with his daughter had driven her to conceive a child with Métis Louis Moosomin that ultimately had caused her death.(40)

The Deacon's manipulative power overwhelms Thom to the extent that he loses all respect for the Deacon's doctrinal authority and comes to see him as the manipulative king that he is:

"Even if he [Block] is a great business man and can run this district like no one else, does that mean that on every subject he must place the only word in every man's mouth and they go home and re-chew it for their family? What has he done to own us? He tells us what is good and what isn't good for us. He keeps us behind this bush away from all the world as if he were one of those mind-scientists who takes rats and puts them in cages and sees how they jump when he sticks them with pins. Behind all this bush, do we have to be the rats of Block and our forefathers? Whenever they jab us, we know what to believe? We don't owe them our souls!"(41)

As Thom's faith and identity are closely

linked to the Deacon's authority, these too are splintered:

His reason told him this [Block's manipulation of people] should not affect him so, but as remembered details fitted into the design only too smoothly, he could not deny that something had crashed within him. In the past six months he had questioned almost the man's [Block] every act: surely his own Christian faith should not now be affected. But the one log that held the jam had been jarred and he could sense within him only the numb void that remained after the rush had vanished. . . . He could not bear his emptiness.(42)

Again there is a correspondence between Thom's perception of his faith and the land. The security and homeness he always felt in Wapiti are replaced by anger and disbelief. As he enters his own spiritual wilderness, the land of Wapiti also becomes barren of security and meaning. What was once a paradise in the wilderness becomes a wasteland. Thom resolves to accept his draft call and "move at last in harmony with all the world."(43)

In the climatic barn scene at the end of the novel, we observe yet another shift in Thom's perspective. Following the school Christmas concert, Thom wanders out to the barn in search of the new teacher, Razia Tantamount. Upon entering the barn Thom is forced to confront the visible reality of evil in Wapiti. Hank Unger, home on leave from the air force, has just been punched in the face by the Deacon's son, Pete, for getting amorous with Razia. Then, Thom exposes to himself his own potential for evil. He swings around and punches Hank's brother, Herb, who had long been tormenting Thom for his

all too Christian ways. When Deacon Block and the other men of the community arrive at the barn and inquire of the events, Razia answers Block: "'What went on here! You're too late for this show-- . . . Pete found things not quite Mennonite! You hadn't told him what to do--so he smashed Hank--and then Thom smashed Herb--all these loving Mennonites smashing!'"(44)

By this scene Wiebe makes it abundantly clear that there is no peace by avoidance and that isolation does not guarantee spiritual purity. The Deacon's land management practices are a failure. Even his own son falls prey to sin. The Deacon himself is shattered by the discovery: "The Deacon bowed his scarred grey head to his hands, and the men of Wapiti community, Métis and Mennonite, standing in an old barn, heard the sobs of a great strong man, suddenly bereft, and broken. They heard, terrified."(45)

Thom, however, emerges from the scene not trampled by despair like the Deacon, but with a new discovery intact. The discovery is of none other than the given Word of God. While driving away from the schoolyard, Thom thinks to himself:

There must lie the way. Not the paths of conscienceless violence or one man's misguided interpretation of tradition. They brought chaos. But the path of God's revelation. Christ's teachings stood clear in the Scriptures; could he but scrape them bare of all their acquired meanings and see them as those first disciples had done, their feet in the dust of Galilee. He must.(46)

Thus, at the end of the novel, Wiebe

affirms that man lives by "what is given and not by what is controlled." The Word of God triumphs in Thom, while the man who controls without an ear to the Word is broken in despair. In regard to the land, one can see a symbolic parallel. In losing his position of authority, the Deacon has lost the land; he is no longer free to manage and manipulate. His kingly rule has ended. Thom, on the other hand, receives the land in the sense that he arrives at a new understanding of Wapiti as home. (47)

Others of Thom's generation also feel the inadequacy of the Deacon's rules, but are not as fortunate as Thom in learning to deal with them. The place Deacon Block has made of Wapiti imprisons them. And this too is a characteristic result of kingly land management. Of Israel's history of landedness, Brueggemann writes:

The very land that promised to create space for human joy and freedom became the very source of dehumanizing exploitation and oppression. Land was indeed a problem in Israel. Time after time, Israel saw the land of promise become the land of problem. The very land that contained the sources of life drove kings to become agents of death. (48)

The situation Brueggemann describes above is precisely the case for Block's own children. Elizabeth and Pete are both hopelessly bound to the land--in both the literal and symbolic meaning of the term. They are powerless to escape the community, and equally powerless to escape the land. They know nothing other than the labour of working the fields according to their father's dictates. (49) They are his slave labour. Elizabeth's death is significant in this context. Her enslavement to

the land is the very cause of her ruin. Ironically, her death occurs at the height of the land's prosperity--harvest. Although the Deacon's management practices make the land prosper, they do not do so for his children. Thus, the king of Wapiti becomes an "agent of death." As we have seen, both Pete and Elizabeth rebel against the king and attempt to break out of the prison; Elizabeth by her desperate plea to Louis Moosomin and Pete by recourse to violence.

Joseph Dueck and Hank Unger are more successful at leaving the confines of Wapiti. Ironically, they both join in the world war, but their motivations could not be more different. Joseph goes to war to fulfill his faith and Hank goes to war in rejection of his faith. Herb Unger also tries to escape the Deacon's oppression, mainly by defying the community's rules of good farming practice. Common to all of these characters is a dissatisfaction with the Deacon's land management practices. They all feel oppressed by his kingly attitude.

It is fascinating to explore how Wiebe uses images of the land itself to reveal and reflect the identity of the characters we have been discussing. Their spiritual state, in particular, becomes more clearly defined by the associations Wiebe presents. Wiebe's use of this technique reinforces the "landed" nature of life in Wapiti.

III.

The most significant land imagery identifying the Deacon's character is that of the rock. In the opening pages of the novel, he is referred to as "the one rock in the whirlpool of the Canadian world." (50) The image is later repeated in the association of Block with granite. (51) The symbol identifies Block's role in the community in two ways. In connection with the religious life of Wapiti, Wiebe writes: "They as a community had built this church, but the church was a House built on the solid Rock." (52) The rock here referred to is not the rock which is the foundation which is Christ the Lord, but the rock that is the Deacon himself. (53) The image reaffirms the Deacon's stature as ruler of Wapiti--even over God. Moreover, we can perceive the action of building the church as the community's way of consecrating their turf. However, in light of the imagery Wiebe presents, it becomes clear that the space is not consecrated by the presence of God. Rather, the place is made holy by the presence of the Deacon and his "ordinances of the fathers." God is imprisoned not only in the church, but in the Deacon's rules as well. Two of three occasions in the novel when we witness a gathering in the church are scenes in which the community receives a dispensation of rules from the Deacon. (54) He truly reigns.

Vicky Schreiber Dill adds another dimension of meaning to the rock symbol: "Deacon Block is

like the rock of the fields which, made into fences "protected" the community but which, left alone in the fields, remained a stumbling block to the farmer."(55) Indeed, Thom struggles with the rocks in the field in the same way he struggles with the Deacon's authority--he stands as Thom's "stumbling block." The rock fences, however, can be seen additionally as a symbol of limitation. The barrier that protects also confines. The symbol then points to the character of the Deacon as one who seeks to protect but who also imprisons.

Another image relating to the Deacon, and also to Thom, is that of the barn. As representative of the positive and negative possibilities for Mennonite faith, each character is associated with a particular barn image. The night of the Christmas play, Wiebe juxtaposes these two images. Thom, wallowing in his void of confusion, is confronted by these two barns. First, he is faced with the barn in the school play, which signifies the place of Christ and into which the young wise men are led by an Indian. Immediately following, comes the barn scene where violence and corruption force Thom to confront the presence of evil. Thom's choices are present before him in these two barns. In the end, he is identified with the barn symbolizing the way of Christ.(56)

Wiebe employs the same type of barn imagery in connection with the Deacon. All of his acts of corruption occur in "the barn." In Russia, his salvaged meat is hidden in the barn; and later, the beating of the

bashkirs occurs in a barn.(57) His confrontation with Louis, again, takes place in a barn, and when Elizabeth dies, the Deacon hides his shame in the barn.(58) All of these instances, combined with the final scene, quite clearly associate his character with the barn symbolizing human depravity.

For the character of Thom, Wiebe employs no single land image consistently. Rather, the images change concurrently with Thom's state of being. Generally, the imagery moves from earth to sky to suggest changes in Thom's orientation. The land or turf, in this case, represents the traditions of the fathers. For example, at the beginning of the novel, Thom is described as being held by the earth.(59) He is captive of the Deacon's traditions. As he becomes aware of the injustices in Wapiti, the images associated with Thom grow less and less earth-bound. Thom's dream is an excellent example of this pattern. In the dream, the bush surrounds Thom threatening to suffocate him. Then suddenly, he is standing in a high tower above the bush. From this point, he watches the forest burn in a terrifying act of destruction. Finally, Thom himself is caught in the "holocaust."(60)

Scholars have interpreted the dream in various ways, calling it an initiation ritual or an indicator of Thom's enlightenment.(61) However, if viewed within the context of the relation of land and faith, the dream images indicate Thom's frustration and need to break

away from the traditions that hold him. "He saw the trees like patriarchs . . . and they moaned in terror, rooted immovable before the scourge."(62) This passage makes the allusion quite clear. That Thom himself is caught in the blaze, indicates his helplessness to prevent his own act of destruction.

At the end of the novel, when Thom actually does break through to a new conception of Mennonite faith, a break with the land is present in the imagery. Thom is "staring skyward . . . driving them [his family] toward the brightest star in the heavens."(63) The image association presents a striking contrast to his earth-boundness of the first chapter.

The character of Herb Unger, although not addressed in detail in section two, deserves attention here. He, along with his brother Hank and the teacher Razia Tantamount, are representative of a fallen spiritual state. Herb is a constant thorn in Thom's side--a Mephisto-like tempter. The suggestiveness of the land imagery alluding to Herb's spiritual state is almost humorous. Wiebe's description of his farmyard, for example, attests to a definite lack of spiritual and moral conviction:

Weeds rioted everywhere. Crouched against a scrawny poplar, the log shack appeared to have been used for a century and then hastily vacated before the filth devoured the inhabitants, its litter sprawling out after them. . . . There was a stamping splash in the barn. . . . Sunlight filtered in through the rotten-straw roof, gleaming on the backs of the horses and the hock-deep slime in which they stood. . . . [Herb] kicked viciously at a soft cow-dropping near

his feet, and walked towards the house. The little pigs grunted away as he neared. Before he entered, he slammed his filthy boot against a single gate-post that had no fence to support. (64)

G.H. Hildebrand accurately translates the imagery into a description of Herb's spiritual state. He describes him as being "in a chaotic spiritual state . . . in a state of sin or resistance to love . . . not at peace with [himself] . . . [and whose] actions are either meaningless or self-indicting." (65)

Wiebe alludes to the spiritual character of Razia by using imagery that associates her with Herb. (66) The occasion is the night of the blizzard when Herb is "stranded" at Razia's home. After arguing with Herb until he finally stomps back out into the snow, Razia stands at the door seething with anger. And, "it was only after some time that she realized her pointed pumps were in the muck that had melted from his boots." (67)

Wiebe reveals the identity of each of these characters in images of the land. The technique not only defines the spiritual "place" of the personalities, but also serves to draw attention to the integration of land and people. The faith of the people is reflected in the land they inhabit and vice versa.

IV.

The relation of land and faith in Peace Shall Destroy Many illuminates how faith can be affected by the interaction of a people and the land they inhabit.

Faith is shaped by relation to the land. The people of Wapiti create a place for themselves out of the north Saskatchewan wilderness which is characterized by geographic isolation and the rules of tradition. Each individual's experience of that place influences their spiritual state.

The first immigrants view the turf as a location for the preservation of life they knew in another land. Consequently, their interest lies not in the land itself, but in what the land can offer them in support of tradition. The wilderness, therefore, is a place of promise to this generation. Isolation afforded the building of a holy paradise. In contrast, the youth of the community experience the bushland and community rules as causes for rebellion. The land is not paradise but prison.

The generational conflict that develops in Wapiti, and eventually leads to Thom's crisis of faith, is over issues of interpretation. The faith principles that the older generation find meaningful and important become causes for resentment in the minds of the youth. Significantly, the rules they find most difficult to accept are those dealing with land management. Land ownership and "the ordinances of the fathers"--the Deacon's two methods for managing the land--eventually drive the youth to rebellion. Kingly land management results in oppression. Many of the younger generation, Elizabeth and Pete Block and Herb and Hank Unger, simply

act in rejection of the constraints. But Thom, under the guidance of Joseph, seeks for a new truth. His conflict with the Deacon is essentially over the place of God's Word in the land.

Deacon Block, by his kingly way of interacting with the land, neglects the Word of God. In his preoccupation to create and sustain the world of Wapiti according to his own design, he forgets three things: 1) that God will not be imprisoned; the land is God's gift given by his word, and he always retains ownership of the land; 2) that the land has its own history; 3) that traditions become distorted without rootage in the Word of God from which they originate.

It is precisely what the Deacon neglects that Thom discovers. As the novel progresses, Thom grows out from under the "ordinances of the fathers" and into a personal awareness of the way of love through God's Word. He reinterprets the meaning of being Christian in a way that makes his conviction his own. Furthermore, in each stage of Thom's growth, from naiveté to first awareness to despair to enlightenment, Thom's way of perceiving the land and his inner spiritual state develop in a corresponding way. His experience of the land awakens him to the inadequacy of tradition, and his growth toward enlightenment always involves both the land and his own faith. His perception of his geographic place is always in accord with his spiritual place and vice versa. Thus is Thom's faith shaped by interaction with the land.

The end of the novel illuminates the result of each of the two ways of perceiving land. The Word of God triumphs in Thom and, in the sense that he arrives at a new feeling of home, he is given the land. The Deacon, on the other hand, falls to ruin. He is led away, "bereft and broken." He is at last aware that he cannot own the land. Wiebe affirms that kingly land management is a wrongful attitude. Isolation does not ensure righteousness or spiritual purity, nor is brotherly love and peace best practiced through avoidance.

Wiebe's vision of true Christian life is exemplified in the characters of Thom and Joseph. Through the words and actions of Joseph, the reader is informed that Christian love and peace must be lived in positive action in the world. Moreover, as we see in Thom Wiens, the way to Christ is in individual confrontation with God's Word and in personal decision. Wiebe, much the same as Hans Harder, advocates a radical individualistic type of Mennonite Christianity as opposed to a religion dominated by a church that is nothing more than a "rule-bound, ethnic oriented institution."(68)

Wiebe's use of land imagery serves two functions in the novel. Quite simply, it facilitates character identification and also defines each individual's attitude about Mennonite faith. The fact that Wiebe chooses land imagery to perform this function adds a further significance. In a symbolic way, the technique reiterates the co-responsive roles of a people

and the turf they inhabit in shaping faith. People do not dwell in a land and remain distinct from it; interaction becomes integration. So, one's faith is not only shaped by interaction with the land, but has its own effect on the land itself. The land, then, comes to reflect the kind of people who inhabit it. Interaction flows in two directions. A people's faith is not unaffected by their position in the land, nor is the land unaffected by a people's faith.

This dual effect is characteristic of landed people. A transient in Wapiti could never feel such interaction--just as a rolling stone gathers no moss. Similarly, problems the people encounter arise from their having land. There is no evidence of generational conflict when people are homeless or life threatened, and issues of land management simply do not arise. These problems, and the questions of faith they elicit, are peculiar to the landed.

NOTES

1. W. J. Keith, The Art of Rudy Wiebe (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981), p. 7.
2. Ibid., p. 3.
3. W. J. Keith ed., A Voice in the Land (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), pp. 134, 151, 217, 218.
4. Donald Cameron, "Rudy Wiebe: The Moving Stream is Perfectly at Rest," in Conversations with Canadian Novelists--2 (Toronto: Macmillan and Co., 1973), p. 148.
5. Sam Solecki, "Giant Fictions and Large Meanings: The Novels of Rudy Wiebe," The Canadian Forum 60 (March 1981): 8.
6. In chapter one of this thesis, Eliade is quoted as writing: ". . . to settle in a territory . . . is undertaking the creation of the world one has chosen to inhabit . . ." This phenomenon is evident in Peace Shall Destroy Many. The people of Wapiti come to a wilderness and, out of that wilderness, they create a very particular world that evolves largely from the choices they make. They unpack their historical baggage, build a church, and in so doing, delimit a holy region. Their special religious concern to live separated from the rest of the world draws into greater relief the distinction between their community or "place" and the rest of the world. To the settlers, the community of Wapiti represents a holy enclave in a profane and chaotic world.
7. Vicky Schreiber Dill discusses this idea in "Land Relatedness in the novels of Rudy Wiebe" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1982).
8. For a review of Brueggemann's dialectic, see chapter one of this study.
9. Generational conflict over the role of tradition seems to be a particular characteristic of landed Mennonites. Other Mennonite novels, with similar settings, contain the same theme. Arnold Dyck's Verloren in der Steppe, for example, is set in a Mennonite colony during the prosperous and secure time of pre-war Russia. The focus of the novel is a young boy's growth away from the traditional faith and vocation of his elders. Gordon Friesen's Flamethrowers, set in rural Kansas, contains a violent confrontation between generations over the issue of faith. Still others such as Helen Martin's Tillie: A

Mennonite Maid and Luella Creighton's High Bright Buggy Wheels can be included in this list. What all these novels hold in common with Peace Shall Destroy Many is that the communities are secure in the land and conflict occurs between generations over the issue of tradition.

10. Rudy Wiebe, Peace Shall Destroy Many (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962; New Canadian Library, 1972), pp. 124, 132. Frank Epp writes that attitudes like the Deacon's were not uncommon for that time: ". . . having been guaranteed by the government all the essential conditions of a happy settlement, they [Mennonites] went about re-creating on their land the Mennonite commonwealth they had left behind." See Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), p. 209.

11. Wiebe, Peace, p. 124.

12. Ibid., p. 185.

13. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 73-78.

14. Ibid., pp. 73, 74.

15. Wiebe Peace, p. 129.

16. Brueggemann, Land, p. 85.

17. Ibid., pp. 86, 87.

18. Wiebe, Peace, p. 51.

19. Ibid., p. 55.

20. This is one of Wiebe's major themes in the novel.

21. Wiebe, Peace, p. 203.

22. Ibid., p. 58.

23. Ibid., p. 203.

24. Brueggemann, Land, p. 83.

25. Ibid., p. 92.

26. Ibid., p. 89.

27. Ibid.

28. H. E. Tiessen, "A Mighty Inner River: Peace in the Fiction of Rudy Wiebe," Journal of Canadian Fiction 2 (Fall 1973): 73.

29. Wiebe, Peace, pp. 60, 61.
30. Ibid., pp. 12, 19.
31. Ibid., p. 22.
32. Ibid., p. 12.
33. Ibid., pp. 18, 19.
34. Ibid., pp. 79, 80.
35. Rudy Wiebe, "New Land, Ancient Land," in The New Land (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1978), p. 2.
36. Wiebe, Peace, p. 83.
37. Wiebe, "New Land," p. 3.
38. Wiebe, Peace, pp. 109-116.
39. Ibid., pp. 201-207.
40. Ibid., pp. 216-219.
41. Ibid., p. 218.
42. Ibid., p. 219.
43. Ibid., p. 220.
44. Ibid., p. 236.
45. Ibid., pp. 236, 237.
46. Ibid., p. 237.
47. Ibid., p. 238.
48. Brueggemann, Land, p. 11.
49. Wiebe, Peace, p. 139.
50. Ibid., p. 21.
51. Ibid., pp. 57, 157, 182.
52. Ibid., p. 52.
53. Matthew 16:18, 7:24, Luke 6:48.
54. Wiebe, Peace, pp. 54-63, 109-116, 149-157.
55. Schreiber Dill, "Land Relatedness," p. 82.
56. Wiebe, Peace, p. 237.

57. Ibid., pp. 127-130.
58. Ibid., pp. 148, 181.
59. Ibid., p. 13.
60. Ibid., pp. 164, 165.

61. G. H. Hildebrand, "The Anabaptist Vision of Rudy Wiebe: A Study in Theological Allegoresis" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, 1982) and Francis Mansbridge, "Wiebe's Sense of Community," Canadian Literature 77 (Summer 1978): 47.

62. Wiebe, Peace, p. 164.
63. Ibid., pp. 238, 239.
64. Ibid., pp. 75-78.
65. Hildebrand, "Anabaptist Vision," p. 99.
66. Ibid.
67. Wiebe, Peace, p. 174.
68. Hildebrand, "Anabaptist Vision," pp. 50, 51.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Blue Mountains of China

I.

The Blue Mountains of China is Rudy Wiebe's third novel. In terms of artistry, it propels Wiebe from the status of beginning novelist to mature artist.(1) Like the best of Wiebe's writing, the novel is complex and demands a committed reader. The complicated nature of the novel has, in fact, sponsored some critical complaint. So, in order to help clarify some of the more confusing aspects of the novel, I will begin with a brief discussion of the structure, language, and themes in The Blue Mountains of China.

Through often abruptly changing characters and settings, Wiebe has woven together an epic tale of Mennonite history spanning one hundred years and four continents. The novel is divided into thirteen chapters, four of which contain the recollections of Frieda Friesen. Between each of her accounts, we are introduced respectively to one, two, and three new sets of characters. Although some critics would disagree, this seemingly disjointed chapter sequence is really very appropriate to the content of the story.(2) Mennonite history is characterized by a series of flights,

wanderings, and migrations interspersed with periods of relative peace and calm. The story of Mennonite history Wiebe has created is structured on exactly this pattern:

A recurrent structural principle of the novel . . . corresponds to the repeated pattern of Mennonite history--a defamiliarizing crisis of flight and action followed by spaces of retrospective reflection which attempt, in a sense, to "domesticate" the experience and to forge a renewed faith.(3)

Thus, the novel's design reflects content.

The language of The Blue Mountains of China is also rather unusual. Not only does Wiebe include many untranslated German terms, but the entire collection of Frieda Friesen's memories is written in a form of directly translated Low German.(4) Other characters, meanwhile, speak quite sophisticated English. By so manipulating language, Wiebe uses voice to indicate each character's status in regard to traditional Mennonite faith.(5)

For traditional Mennonites, an important element in maintaining separation from the world is the continued use of the Low German language.(6) It acts upon them as a daily reminder of their religious conviction, and also serves to identify their non-conformity to the larger world. That Frieda Friesen's recollections are written in an Anglicized form of Low German is a constant reminder to the reader of not only the Low German she speaks, but of her religious commitment to traditional Mennonite faith as well. Thus, the form of language in the Frieda Friesen chapters acts upon the reader in the same way that Frieda's language would act for her in her world.

Consider by contrast the language of Elizabeth

Driedger/Cereno in conversation with her friend Rachel.(7) She speaks a playful but sophisticated English appropriate to her typology as a "worldly" Mennonite. In this way, her voice identifies her as one who lives a lifestyle removed from traditional Mennonite ways.

Themes in the novel are multiple. Mennonite wanderings in search of their "promised land", symbolized in the title and throughout the novel as the blue mountains, is a central theme. The trials of faith the Mennonites undergo in their wanderings, their relationship to both the land and the larger world, and the common struggles of all humanity in dealing with the elemental realities of suffering, self-preservation, and death are just a few of the other themes that Wiebe includes in his story.

As in Peace Shall Destroy Many, Wiebe is also concerned to voice his vision of true Anabaptist Christianity over against its various historical aberrations. To this end, he includes themes addressing both his ideal of Christian faith and life, and the shortcomings of Mennonite societies in Russia, Paraguay, and Canada.

All of the themes blend together to produce a novel that is primarily about ways of thinking--ways of understanding faith and of acting on that perception.

Wiebe also makes extensive use of Biblical material in The Blue Mountains of China. Like Peace Shall Destroy Many, Biblical analogies and allusions serve to

define and elucidate many of the characters' thoughts and actions. For example, the confrontation between Jacob V and Escha recalls the Biblical drama between Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25-27. Samuel Reimer's call to prophecy is a "parallel-cum-parody" of I Samuel 3.(8) The eucharistic imagery surrounding David Epp [2]'s self-sacrifice and the cross-bearing of John Reimer are also examples of allusions to Biblical episodes.

Just beneath the surface of these occasional highlights, however, the Bible is also present as a structural unit. Wiebe's literary technique has been described as "translating" history by creatively interpreting and presenting the facts of history in fictional form.(9) The model Wiebe uses to create these "translations" is the Bible:

The Bible provides him [Rudy Wiebe] with a hermeneutical model which yields up both the deep structures of his creations and the methodology in terms of which he "translates" the most recent histories he writes. The Bible is an "absent" text on which Wiebe's writing is a kind of present gloss . . .
(10)

In The Blue Mountains of China, Mennonite history is patterned along the lines of Biblical history, thereby creating a story of 100 years of Mennonite wanderings in the "elemental shape of the larger Biblical anthology from Genesis to Sermon on the Mount."(11) This technique is an effective device for contrasting Wiebe's own Anabaptist vision with, what are in his opinion, wayward or antiquated ones. The contrast is demonstrated mostly through the Biblical typologies that Wiebe associates with

his characters. Furthermore, through this technique, the entire novel becomes allegorical.

Recognition of the Biblical structure and surface analogies in The Blue Mountains of China is essential to our exploration of the relation of land and faith in the novel, for this too is correspondingly Biblical. In terms of our categories of histories of landedness and landlessness, The Blue Mountains of China is, in effect, a recapitulation of this entire study. As a Mennonite epic, all of the histories of landedness and landlessness we have so far seen, are present again in this novel. Moreover, Wiebe's presentation of these histories corresponds to the correlations between the Mennonites' and Israelites' histories in the land that have been discussed in earlier chapters of this study.

The story of The Blue Mountains of China depicts events in the lives of five Mennonite families: the Jacob Friesens, the Isaak Friesens, the David Epps, the Samuel Reimers, and the Helmut Driedgers. The Jacob and Isaak Friesen families represent traditional, cultural, ethnic Mennonite faith and ways of thinking. Their histories are "translated" on the Biblical model of the Old Testament Israelites. The David Epp family represents the radical existential Christianity of personal choice and affirmative action, and therefore, embodies a New Testament disciple typology. The remaining two families act as connecting and/or contrasting figures in the drama.

I will first explore the Jacob and Isaak Friesen

family histories, then the David Epp's, to be followed by the Samuel Reimer's. The analysis will focus on each family's Biblical typology and its implications regarding the relation of land and faith, and Wiebe's Anabaptist vision. Where appropriate, some discussion of Wiebe's presentation of Mennonite society as it exists in Russia, Paraguay, and Canada will also be included.

II.

The Jacob and Isaak Friesen families are the Mennonites Wiebe refers to as always wanting to be Jews.(12) Their "Jewish" thinking is characterized by an orthodox, cultural, and ethnic faith which is concerned predominantly with land and family. Their histories are "translated" on the Biblical models of the Israelites' experiences of landlessness in exile and in the desert.

The Jacob Friesens are landowners in Russia who lose their land through the Russian Revolution. They are the same landed made landless that we have seen in A Russian Dance of Death and No Strangers in Exile. Thus, their history is paradigmatic of the Israelites' experience of exile from Canaan. The Isaak Friesens, on the other hand, are landless from the onset of their story. Isaak, being Jacob III's younger brother by ten minutes, has no birthright to the family land. His emigration to Canada from Russia begins a family history of wandering in the wilderness always in search of their

own promised land. As such, this family history is akin to the Israelites' experience of their forty-year wandering in the Sinai desert.

These two genealogies are also representative of Walter Brueggemann's gift/grasp perspectives of the land, and embody the positive and negative aspects of land-oriented faith. The Jacob Friesens, as a landed people, are graspers. They are landowners who have allowed the land to reduce their faith to a matter of training and thought. It is the kind of faith we witnessed earlier in the character of Hans Neufeld in No Strangers in Exile; i.e., defined by outward structures and devoid of inner conviction. As it was with Hans Neufeld, the Jacob Friesens' faith cannot sustain them through the suffering of land loss. The Isaak Friesens, contrarily, are blind trusters. Like the believing Israelites in the desert, they live in the sure hope that "history is on its way to new and good land." (13) They quite simply believe, accept, hope, and wait. And the strength of their faith always sustains them throughout the many trials they confront in their wanderings.

The Jacob Friesen genealogy is linked typologically with the Biblical sons of Jacob or "Ya'agobh." (14) The association identifies the basic family typology as "grasping, supplanting, overreaching." And, as we have previously seen, graspers of the land are always destined to lose it. The result of losing the land

brings suffering, despair, and death to the family.

The reader is introduced to the Jacob Friesen genealogy in chapter two, "Sons and Heirs." Already the family patriarch, Jacob III, has been murdered by Makhnovite bandits. The chapter opens with the grandson, Jacob V, returning home after six weeks in a GPU prison. He dashes up to the front door of the house, anticipating a warm family welcome. Instead, he confronts a "black hole." In being left behind by his fleeing family, Jacob V has lost almost his entire world: "'jesus has come again and taken them and I am left for hell.'"(15)

The loss of family has turned the paradise of the family "Hof" into a wilderness wasteland. As he wanders in the farmyard, Jacob sees nothing but "yawning doors" and "cavernous empty spaces."(16) And the land--that as eldest son was his promise --has been taken over by the Soviets. Now Jacob V is without family and without land. He is so alienated from all that was once his neatly ordered reality that life, as it now exists for him, seems empty and meaningless.(17)

Meanwhile, Escha, the Russian laborer, torments Jacob with temptation to sexual sin: "'It's a new age. We're free. So let your schwengel nose around--nobody's watching.'"(18)

Jacob tries to "brace against" Escha's moral depravity by taking thought: "He had been trained well, a good Mennonite boy; learned quiet joy and denial and prayers, . . . Thought had been his redemption; . . . he

had been taught to think on his sins: . . . man is not a carefree brute; . . . (19)

Jacob's faith had been a matter of training/thought and he resorts to that training/faith in his struggle for self-control against Escha. He reads the Bible and he prays. But his prayers, his faith, do not influence his actions: ". . . he still prayed, as he always had. . . . for Muttachi . . . for his sisters . . . for his mother . . . --the things he had always automatically prayed for . . . but he did nothing."(20)

The above passage is of central importance for understanding not only the mind of Jacob V, but Wiebe's Anabaptist vision as well. Jacob V prays in the way he had been trained, expressing thoughts for the well being of his family. But his prayers are essentially idle and selfish; for, they ignore the Christians duty to his brethren and they influence no effect on his own actions. This theme recurs periodically in the novel, and each time it surfaces, Wiebe expresses the idea that such idle and selfish faith is not Christian. As we shall discover, for Wiebe, faith must be lived in action.

Eventually, the "un-necessity" of life without land or family overwhelms Jacob's attempts at self-control. Life is simply meaningless:

He did not know anything. He did nothing. The whole village did nothing. Despite the day-long sunshine there was no fall plowing, no visiting; only the dogs howled every night as if they were mad. At times, when he awoke from sleep or just before he fell into it on the blank sheets he could nearly have cried to long, to do, know; . . . here was comfort, looseness, such un-necessity that he could simply float in any

position and seemingly it made no difference about anything. . . . Necessity was nowhere.(21)

Using wind imagery to symbolize the presence of God, Wiebe indicates that Jacob's faith degenerates to meaninglessness, as his life is meaningless: ". . . he felt motionless too, a sack hung empty by a string in a wandering wind and the life before his taking as meaningless as the wind that never again blew to stir it."(22) Just as his faith cannot inspire him to action, so the taking thought that was his redemption cannot save him.(23)

Wiebe portrays Jacob's final downfall in images of body/spirit dualism. Jacob descends from his world of thought into the animalistic or physical world of sex and violence embodied in the figures of Escha and his harlot. He commits the two great Mennonite sins--acts of sex and violence.(24) Eventually, Jacob V fosters his own demise and is killed. Thus, for Jacob V, the loss of land and a landed way of life ends in faithlessness and death.

In "Sons and Heirs," we are also introduced to the character of Jacob IV, young Jacob's father. Jacob IV is a central figure in the novel and much more complex a character than his son. Nonetheless, his experience of losing the land is very much the same as his son's. Jacob IV's faith does not sustain him and, he too, descends from the world of redeeming thought into faithless, brute physicality.

Through the recollections of Jacob V, we learn that Jacob IV, by taking advantage of those Mennonites who

were fleeing the region in terror of the new Soviet power, became an exceedingly wealthy individual.(25) He literally grasped up all the abandoned farms and businesses in the surrounding area. His attachment to his property fills him with a giant self-confidence that blinds him to the very real threat of the communist regime:

"let them run can't fit in when a little changes
or some stupid communist says don't preach so much let
them run won't take this from me they can't do
anything without me and they'll have to keep exile
pooh I'm no preacher"(26)

Jacob IV is a classic example of a landed individual who cannot believe he could really lose the land.(27)

Eventually, fear, generated by the imprisonment of his son, drives him to abandon both his son and his property. He loses his land to become a runner, a hider, a liar.(28) Here, in the character of Jacob IV, Wiebe effectively explodes the Mennonite myth that emigration is always a pilgrimage of faith. Jacob IV's flight to Moscow is a selfish and cowardly act of self-preservation.

The reader is informed in chapter four, "Black Vulture," that Jacob IV's escape attempt is unsuccessful. He is captured in Moscow and sent into exile. It is not until chapter eight, "Cloister of the Lilies," that the reader once again meets Jacob IV. At this point in time, he has already survived three years of labor camp existence.

From our analysis of No Strangers in Exile, we know that to be exiled is to be landless in a hostile and

barren wilderness, completely alienated from all structures of meaning and historical identity. Friesen's experience in "Cloister of the Lilies" is of precisely this kind of wilderness. In addition, his experiences in chapter eight point beyond themselves. In terms of structure, the chapter is a repetition of Jacob V's experience on the family "Hof." Through an ingenious use of setting, Wiebe juxtaposes colony and cloister, thereby reiterating a theme we observed in Peace Shall Destroy Many: that is, that isolation on the land does not guarantee spiritual purity.

The episode begins with Friesen, along with two other prisoners and two guards, stumbling into a partially demolished building to escape the cold of a northern winter storm.(29) Slowly, the group discovers that the building they now occupy was once a convent. They are awed. The nearest town is twelve hundred kilometers away. The prisoner, Dmitri, explains how it is possible to find an old convent in so remote a location: "' Yes! Yes! Out far away, in exile, that is what they wanted, far away so no one could find them or bother and they could humble and bow their wills and fast and pray to--'"(30) The remote location of the convent would have been deliberately chosen for its distance from civilization; and for the same reasons that the Mennonites sought isolated, wilderness tracts of land for their colonies. Inhabitants of both colony and cloister wished to avoid the evils of the world and worship God in purity and peace.

In contrast, this cloister now stands in ruin, inhabited by morally depraved Soviet guards and their prisoners. Acts of sex and violence defile the place where people once lived devoted to peace and prayer. Thus, what was once wilderness paradise is, for Friesen, a wilderness wasteland--hostile and barren.

The transformation is the same as that experienced by Jacob V on the family farm. In both situations, the sins of sex and violence occur where people once lived as in a holy enclave, and both of these sacred environs are defiled. By so juxtaposing the settings of cloister and colony, Wiebe pronounces again that isolation does not nurture spiritual purity. There can be no peace through avoidance.

Following the pattern of his son's experience, Friesen struggles for self-control against depravity. He, too, turns to his trained faith by reciting verses, hymns, and prayers. Like his son, Friesen tries to avoid sin by taking thought, by remembering.

But Friesen is also given another reminder of a different sort. The lilies painted on the convent wall call to his mind the Biblical lilies of the field which remind us to "take no thought." He tries to consider those lilies and take no thought, but he fails. In conversation with the nameless fugitive, who quietly affirms God's goodness while his wife is raped by the Soviet guards, Jacob IV expresses his doubt of God's justice. He asks: "'Then why did this happen? To us?'"

The fugitive responds with the ambiguous statement: "'To live, it is the most necessary possibility.'"(31) The statement takes on prophetic significance for Friesen, but nevertheless remains an enigma to him.

In the end, like his son before him, Jacob IV suffers the same spirit/body descension and is reduced to the animal: ". . . so much vanished, even that once learned by rote as a child and known in perfect thoughtlessness. In the grey immobility of years there was only your muscles, your gut throbbing now . . ." (32) The "waving lily fields of Mennonite childhood" become "impossible." (33) Thought, remembering, gives way to faithless brute survival. So again, Wiebe concludes that the Jacob Friesens' trained faith is ineffective and inauthentic for it does not sustain them when the land is lost.

Friesen continues to rely on the strength of his muscles as he wanders in the wilderness of labor camps, then to his old home of Gnadenfeld, and finally to Canada. When he emerges in chapter thirteen, it is to state: "'I believe nothing.'" (34) He is both geographically and spiritually dispossessed.

In addition to the characterizations of the Jacob Friesen family, Wiebe also includes in this genealogical history, a critical evaluation of Mennonite society in Russia. His commentary reiterates the same theme evident in A Russian Dance of Death and Peace Shall Destroy Many; namely, that "preoccupation with land can blind the

believer to the values it is intended to protect."(35)
 The Mennonites' absorption in making the land prosper resulted in materialistic and racist attitudes to the neglect of their Christian commitment to brotherly love. Both Commissar Serebro and Escha are representative victims who suffer as a result of these attitudes.

Escha's maltreatment arises out of the conflict between himself and Jacob V. When perceived in the context of the Biblical analogy of Jacob and Esau, it becomes evident that Jacob V--true to his genealogical typology--supplants his Russian half-brother. The conflict between Jacob and Escha, thus also reinforces Dietrich Neufeld's assertion in A Russia Dance of Death that the "Mennonites were neither brotherly nor apostolic in their treatment of their Russian brothers in their historical paradise."(36)

It is important to the analogy that we recognize that Jacob V and Escha are actually half-brothers. Wiebe hints at the relation on several occasions. Their appearance, for example, is strikingly similar. They are the same age, same height, with the same broad stature. They both have green eyes and reddish-blond hair. Even their faces are so alike that Serebro is led to comment: "'You are very alike, big, your faces--you could almost--strange.'"(37) The "fly-by-night" father, then, is actually Jacob IV; which makes Jacob V's conclusions about Escha's father being some "circus clown" an ironic commentary on the Mennonites' hypocritical social and

moral practices.

As the conflict continues between Jacob and Escha, we can observe that Jacob supplants his half-brother in two ways.(38) First, he promises Escha "half" of the rubles left behind by Jacob IV--150 out of 600! Then, he violently assaults Escha in order to satisfy his lust with Escha's woman. In this way, out of sheer greed, Mennonite brother supplants Russian brother.

In the case of Comissar Serebro, Wiebe highlights the injustices that Mennonites heaped on their own kin. Serebro is a victim of the land inheritance problem. Since the historical details of this issue have already been outlined in Chapter Two of this study, there is no need to repeat its historical development. The injustice of the landowners' maltreatment of the disinherited is summed up in Serebro's pitiful wail: "'Yes, misbegotten. The younger son of a younger son living in the worker shacks at the end of the village while cousins lived fat, and could afford Zentralschul and Kroeger clocks.'"(39) Serebro's solution to the problems of disinheritance is to disinherit the Mennonites and be "re-born" into communism.

Through the two characters of Serebro and Escha, Wiebe exposes how the very land that was intended to preserve Mennonite faith, both usurped and distorted that faith in Mennonite minds. Moreover, by once again employing wind imagery to symbolize the presence of God, Wiebe includes a divine judgement upon these wayward Mennonites. The Friesen farm is devastated "as if a huge

wind had raged in and gutted all to its shell . . ."(40)

The theme of God's judgement can be further developed by regarding "Sons and Heirs" as a unit. G. H. Hildebrand has determined that this entire chapter is a parabolic sermon preached to the Biblical text of Psalm 49.(41) I cite the Psalm at length:

I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon a harp. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever:) . . . Their inward thought is, that their house shall continue forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah.(42)

The correspondences are multiple. Moreover, in that multiplicity the central message is that those who call the land their own shall lose it according to God's judgement. This theme, of course, is not new to us. For it is the same idea Walter Brueggemann expresses in terms of the dialectic of gift and grasp, and one that has recurred in all of the previous novels of this study.

Generally, Wiebe's portrayal of Mennonite society in Russia reflects Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites' experience of landedness in Canaan, and bears out the implications of the gift/grasp dialectic that we have witnessed in previous novels; i.e., working the land does not guarantee spiritual insight or security.(43) Rather, the land seduces its inhabitants away from a faith

of brotherly love to the predominance of personal, materialistic pursuits. The Jacob Friesen family history is true to this form. They are graspers and supplanters whose greed for land and wealth ends in land loss, alienation, and apostasy. Their landed lifestyle produces a faith so ineffective that it cannot influence their own actions or sustain them in their suffering. They are part of a society that Wiebe portrays as racist, materialistic, and finally subject to God's condemnation.

III.

The Isaak Friesen genealogy stands in typological opposition to the Jacob Friesen genealogy. They are a family whose lives are governed by faith and hope, and never despair. The family patriarch, Isaak Friesen, was born the younger brother of Jacob III, and so from the beginning of the family history they are landless. Their story is one of wandering in the wilderness, always hopeful that their search for promised land will be rewarded.

Frieda, Isaak's daughter, is the spokesperson for this family. We come to know their story through her recollections in the four chapters entitled, "My Life: That's As It Was." She is the "Muttachi" of this genealogy and, like old Muttachi in the Jacob Friesen family, is the bearer of her family's genealogical information. A comparison of her character with the Jacob Friesens' Muttachi clearly distinguishes the differing

natures of these two families. They are essentially inverted images of one another; the old Muttachi is materialistic, stubborn, and cynical while Frieda is spiritual, humble, and hopeful.

The first chapter of "My Life: That's As It Was," contains Frieda's recollections of growing up on the Canadian prairie. In this chapter, she makes two statements regarding land and faith that, together, characterize the entire experience of the Isaak Friesen genealogy:

1) Every quarter we had, even if it looked so good when we moved it always seemed to have something wrong. (44)

Although referring to the various homesteads that the Isaak Friesen family pioneered in Manitoba, this statement bears larger implications as well. For one thing, it indicates the family's land-oriented perspective. They stubbornly cling to agriculture as their only possible true vocation. Even after running a store for ten years, Frieda and her husband return to the land. Frieda explains: "We wanted to be farmers again." (45) Secondly, the statement characterizes the Friesen's constant search for a perfect homestead. Frieda's years in Canada are marked by constant motion. Both as a young girl and later as a married woman with seven children, she and her family wander the prairie wilderness in search of the land that will bring them peace and prosperity.

Eventually, their quest leads them to the Chaco

region of Paraguay. Here, to the extent that they are able to live in peace and maintain the traditions of their faith and culture, the wilderness becomes a kind of garden. However, as its name so aptly expresses, the "green hell" of the Chaco never yields the security and prosperity of a true promised land. The Friesens are continually plagued with injuries, ill health, and poverty: "Nature is always knocking them down or causing them to back off or withdraw."(46) Ultimately, they are defeated by the land.

The last phrase of Frieda's statement; i.e., ". . . it always seemed to have something wrong," expresses one of Wiebe's main themes in the novel. It is impossible to ever arrive at a promised land--the blue mountains look utopian from a distance but when you get to them, they lose their utopian quality.

2) "But think always this, . . . it does all come from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty."(47)

This second statement recurs frequently in the four chapters of Frieda's memoirs. Basically, it denotes the Isaak Friesens' entire faith and way of thinking. Faith is a matter of belief--a pure and simple belief that all things come from God. Consequently, they are able to passively accept all the events in their lives without questioning God's judgement or justice. In response to many of the tragedies she encounters in her life, Frieda thinks: "That's how it is with the world: who can ever foresee how. . . . I suppose some things in this world only God has to understand."(48)

Contrary to the Jacob Friesens, whose faith is a matter of "taking thought," the Isaak Friesens live a "thoughtless faith." (49) But it is a strong and hopeful faith. In the wilderness, where the Jacob Friesens' faith collapses in doubt, the Isaak Friesens are steadfast. Their faith always sustains them in their journey across the land. In fact, it is their faith that leads them to emigrate to Paraguay. Frieda's husband, Johann, makes this very clear to us:

"Maybe we were wrong, maybe we were right, but we thought we couldn't raise our children when they took the German and the Bible lessons away in school. Maybe we were wrong, maybe we were right, but we believed it. Here we have land, we have had quiet here, peace and quiet. . . . We did what we believed." (50)

In the respect that the Friesens truly emigrate for their faith, they authenticate the Mennonite "pilgrimage" myth that Wiebe previously belies with the Jacob Friesens' running, hiding, and lying. Their belief prompts their actions, and for this reason, the Isaak Friesens' journey is a true pilgrimage of faith.

Although Wiebe presents the steadfast strength and quiet hope of Frieda Friesen as admirable comparative to the Jacob Friesens' apostasy, he does not hesitate to also expose the weakness in her way of thinking. Wiebe criticizes the rigid ethnicity and isolationism of the Paraguayan colonies for producing a racist mentality. The two representatives of the church in Paraguay--the Older and Younger Elder Wiebes--caution against association with either the native Lengua Indians or the newly arrived

"Russlander" Mennonites.(51) The Indians must be avoided for they are clearly an unclean and lustful bunch.

Similarly, the Russlanders must be less pure than the Kanadier Mennonites, for they had emigrated only once for their faith:

Not that the Kanadier were proud; Elder Wiebe the Younger preached that pride was the most devilish of the Devil's many weapons. Besides there was no need for pride. It was simply a fact that a child in Simons colony might know; their fathers left Russia in 1874-80 and emigrated to Canada because the Russian world was becoming impossible for their beliefs, but these Russlander found theirs adjustable enough to stay until 1929. How they had become modern it was unnecessary to discuss; some, they heard, had attended technical schools and even universities in Petersburg, or Kiev, perhaps Moscow. No wonder the communists had to take their land away before they would leave.(52)

Through a masterful use of irony, Wiebe here expresses the same attitude of exclusivity that we observed in Jacob V in Russian Mennonite society.

The point Wiebe is demonstrating is basically a reiteration of the theme that purity through isolation on the land--peace by avoidance--is an irresponsible denial of Christian discipleship. The passive, thoughtless faith of traditional Mennonitism--of "Bible, Catechism, Kirchenbuch, plow and shovel"(53)--albeit hopeful, trusting, and self-sustaining is, in the last analysis, a shirking of the Christians duty to love all brothers. Although Frieda Friesen's faith always supports her, it does not influence others. Frieda's name, "peace freezing," gives abundant indication of Wiebe's perspective.(54) Frieda's peace is frozen in the traditions of her colony lifestyle and way of thinking.

Chapter seven, "The Well," further dramatizes this theme. The chapter is often interpreted as the occasion of Frieda's daughter, Anna's, trial of temptation.(55) In the form of Joseph Hiebert, the disobedient son of Pastor Hoppity Hiebert, Anna encounters "the world." The two meet at the village well, both seeking shelter from a storm. While they wait for the storm to subside, the young Russlander entertains Anna with stories and *terere*. Anna is fascinated by, but not lured into, Joseph's foreign world. Instead, she returns to the safety of her familiar world and eventually discovers a life of quiet joy.(56)

One might regard the *dénouement* of this episode as an affirmation of faith; Anna is tempted but remains strong in the ways of her faith tradition. Thereby, one also affirms that the quiet, passive life is valuable--a true Christianity.

There is, however, an alternate and more fitting way to interpret this chapter; i. e., by reversing the status of the two characters.(57) The meeting at the well then becomes the occasion for Joseph's redemption: "What is at stake in 'The Well' is Joseph Hiebert's soul, and Anna was obviously the instrument chosen to redeem it."(58) The trial Anna experiences is a call to authentic existence. In this context, the end of the chapter suggests failure. Anna's passive faith cannot inspire others. Joseph abandons the Mennonite way of life and thought, and Anna returns to her tongue-tied Abraham

Funk. Again, the name betrays the inadequacy of a purely passive and unquestioning faith. "Funk" as a noun means "coward, panic, fear"; as a verb, it means "to flinch or shirk."(59)

This alternative interpretation, I think, presents an accurate perception of the events in "The Well." It especially rings true in comparison to the New Testament figures which will be discussed in the pages to follow.

As we have seen heretofore, the two genealogies of the Jacob and Isaak Friesens, as typologically Old Testament figures, are people whose faith is always shaped by their relation to the land. The Jacob Friesens are graspers and supplanters, who allow their preoccupation with the land to reduce their faith to a matter of training the conscience. Their faith cannot help them to accept or comprehend the loss of their promised land. In the wilderness of landlessness, spirituality gives way to animalistic, physical behavior.

The Isaak Friesens, on the other hand, wander continuously in search of their promised land. Their faith of thoughtless belief fosters an attitude of passive acceptance that sustains them throughout their trials. For all their strength of faith, however, they do not ever arrive at a promised land. The land always dominates them. Neither does their faith hold a power to influence others. Their passive, land-oriented faith does not yield.

The collective result of both the graspers' and

trustees' ways of thinking are societies steeped in racism, isolationism, and/or materialism; which, in Wiebe's view, are irresponsible of Christian duty. The traditional colony lifestyle of separation from the world, with its inherent tendency to focus on land and family, prevents these Mennonites from attaining a truly active and effective Christianity.

IV.

Wiebe's Anabaptist vision steps out from the shadows of social critique in the characters of the David Epp family. In the three David Epps, Wiebe embodies his ideal of Christian faith and life. All of these men are followers of Christ who enact a discipleship of radical, individual choice and decisive action, which affects the choices made by others. Typologically, they are New Testament disciple figures. The characteristics that mark the Old Testament land-followers are conspicuously absent. For example, none of the David Epps are agriculturalists. In fact, they demonstrate a decided lack of interest in land--either with having it or keeping it. Rather, their preoccupation is with salvation--the inner wilderness. Moreover, their concern is never a self-centered or personal consideration. Unlike the Friesen families, who are concerned largely with themselves or their immediate families, the David Epps' concern is for others, be they Russian, Indian, or Mennonite. Their way of thinking exceeds the colonial limitations of culture and ethnicity,

of separation and passivity, that bind the Old Testament figures to the land. Wiebe emphasizes this typological distinction by omitting genealogical enumeration in the David Epp family. The technique emphasizes the individuality of the characters, as it indicates that their identity is not derived from family, history, or land. They understand themselves in relation to Christ. The following discussion will focus on how each of the David Epps exemplifies Wiebe's ideal of Christian faith in action, and its implications regarding land and faith.

The character of the eldest David Epp [1] is known to us through the recollections of his son, Franz, contained in chapter four, "Black Vulture." We are told that during the Makhnovite raids on Mennonite villages in Russia, David Epp was no "runner, hider, and liar." Rather, he lay a table to feed the murderers, and then followed them out of his house, preaching and reading Bible verses to them about the sin of killing!(60) His character is a remarkable contrast to Jacob Friesen IV.

Wiebe brings David Epp's authentic faith into more direct contrast with the selfish and idle faith of runners, hidiers, and liars in the scene in Moscow on the night Jacob Friesen IV is apprehended by the GPU. Samuel Balzar (Reimer), a selfish and fear-ridden man, expresses elation that, because he and his family survive the GPU inspection undetected, God has answered his prayers. David Epp quietly admonishes Reimer's selfishness with these words: "'Ernst, I think Mrs. Friesen was praying,

too.'"(61) This simple reply raises again the issue Wiebe first presents in "Sons and Heirs"; i.e., that prayer for one's family without action to betray the conviction of faith that inspires prayer is not authentic faith. It is merely selfish and idle thinking.

In keeping with Wiebe's ideal of faith, David Epp's admonition moves others to more authentic lives of faith. First, it plays a part in convincing Sam U. Reimer of the selfishness of his own life and of the necessity to act in response to his call from God. And then through Sam, it helps to sway Sam's brother, John, into rejecting the Mennonite status quo of his day.

The sacrificial action of David Epp [2], detailed in chapter nine, "Drink Ye All of It," is an act of discipleship that, similarly, transforms the lives of several characters. His radical decision to return to Russia after his entire village escapes over the Amur River into China, appears a futile gesture to many of the people in the novel.(62) What can one man do to save from Soviet punishment all of the Mennonites whom the escaped ones had to leave behind? The louse imagery at the beginning and end of the chapter also seems to indicate that his action is futile.(63)

David Epp [2]'s stream of consciousness recollections of excerpts from the Last Supper, however, sheds new interpretive light on his decision. As the Biblical passages run through David's mind, he is overcome with guilt. He feels a personal guilt over the

selfishness of his own self-preservation, while others suffer for his freedom.(64) As well, he feels a historical guilt for all of his ancestors "who moved and built and grew fat and cared nothing."(65) These feelings compel David to perceive himself, inevitably, as the instrument of historical justice. He cannot think only of himself and his family. So, his return to Russia is not so much an attempt to rescue the Mennonites as it is an act of atonement for all the runners, hidiers, and liars in Russian Mennonite history.

As David is moved by feelings of guilt toward his final decision of self-sacrifice, one can observe a simultaneous change in his perspective about the land and his faith. At the beginning of the chapter, he, like other Mennonites, believes in a promised land. While still in Russia, that promised land was always before him in the visible, "faint blue straggle of the Great Kinghans."(66) They always beckoned and tempted him: ". . . when in some far land we are free then--"(67)

Once he arrives in those mountains, however, he sees them "black and jagged . . . like fangs along the horizon."(68) Simultaneously, his faith that harboured illusions of promised land also shatters. The formula prayers of his childhood become useless.(69) However, unlike the Jacob Friesens, who experience the same uselessness of trained faith and descend into faithlessness, David Epp [2] breaks through to a heightened resolve of faith.(70)

In keeping with his new resolve, David Epp comes to the conclusion that land is not the solution for a life of peace: "In the moonlight outside he thought he could see the blue line of the mountains far away, beautiful as they had ever been from there. But he knew now that was only his imagination. Or romantic nostalgia."(71)

Thus, David Epp [2] transcends the limitations of traditional Mennonite thinking. He recognizes that promised land is an historical illusion. Land, family, and even his own self-preservation are abandoned for positive, Christ-imitating action. His character is a ". . . powerful artistic embodiment or incarnation of the essence of what Jesus means to Wiebe's Anabaptist vision. . . . Epp is a convincing Christian hero, a practical visionary . . . taking seriously the impossible but necessary task of imitating Jesus."(72)

Whether David Epp [2] is successful in helping the Mennonites still trapped in Russia is never our privilege to discover. But we are given ample evidence that the gesture is far from futile. Again, in keeping with Wiebe's ideal of Christian faith, the value of David's action is known by its influence on others. For example, David Epp [2]'s son, David Epp [3], becomes a missionary to the Indians in Paraguay, inspired solely by the legend of his father's salvific act.(73) Considering the church elders' isolationist attitude toward the Indians, it is fairly clear that David Epp [3] also transcends the limitations of cultural, ethnic Mennonitism. Like his

father, he rejects the lifestyle and way of thinking of the colony to actively carry out the Christian mandate to love one's brother. As we shall see, the lives of the David Epps [2] and [3] both bear a significant influence on the two Reimer brothers, Samuel and John.

Franz Epp, the brother of David [2], is somewhat different from the other members of his family. He does not embody the radical, disciple typology that characterizes the Davids. Instead, his character is a combination of action and reflection. As a young man in Moscow, he performs one great act of daring, but as we meet him in chapter four, he is a man given to reflection. As such, his character provides an important balance to the other members of his family. Whereas the Davids represent Wiebe's positive ideal of Christian faith in action, Franz is the one who finds himself "soaked up" by the evil or negative possibilities of Mennonite faith in history. He is like the Davids, though, in the respect that his recollection of the events in Moscow has a lasting effect on the choices of someone else; namely, John Reimer, who is the receiver of Franz's story in chapter four.

To summarize the Epp family typology, we can say that they are the characters who embody Wiebe's ideal of Anabaptist/Mennonite faith and life. They live a discipleship of radical, Christ-imitating action that arises out of personal decision and also influences others to a more authentic life of faith. The David Epps stand

in contradistinction to the Jacob and Isaak Friesen families, in that the values of ethnicity and isolation on the land are forsaken for the positive action of Christian brotherly love. In so doing, they also reveal the inadequacy of the self-centered and idle faith of the runners, hiders, and liars and of the frozen, passive faith of thoughtless belief which place land and family at the center of faith.

V.

In the Samuel Reimer genealogy, no distinct typological characterization is possible. Although the Samuel Reimer/Balzer of the Moscow scene in chapter four is a runner, hider, and liar of the Jacob Friesen IV type, his two sons, Samuel U. Reimer and John Reimer, do not follow this characterization. As there are individuals in the novel who influence the choices of others, there must be people whose ways of thinking are changed. Sam Reimer's two sons, in particular, are people whose lives are transformed by the influential effect of the David Epps' actions. For this reason, the family typology is best described as in flux or progression. Our analysis will focus primarily on the two Reimer brothers, the ways in which their lives are changed, and the relevant implications regarding land and faith.

Chapter twelve, "The Vietnam Call of Samuel U. Reimer," is a poignant and bitterly ironic account of one

man's attempt to answer the call to authentic existence. Drawing on the Biblical episode of I Sam. 3, Wiebe presents the situation of a call to prophecy in a Canadian Mennonite community. (74) Through the struggles of Sam U. Reimer, Wiebe also presents a scathing critique of Canadian Mennonite society. Just as history is known to repeat itself, many of Wiebe's criticisms echo his portrayals of the Mennonite societies in Russia and Paraguay. And again, they bear a significant message about land and faith.

Samuel U. Reimer has lived the complacent life of the landed. He is "an ordinary still Mennonite," who works the land, raises a family, and attends church on Sunday. These duties he performs somnolently, without ever really thinking about the nature of his own existence. (75) Ironically, Sam does not hear. The voices of those around him--his children, his wife, the pastor--do not penetrate his somnolence. Then one night he is called by God: "'I am the God of your fathers, the Lord your God. Go and proclaim peace in Vietnam.'" (76) As in a classic tale of one who marches to the beat of a different drummer, Sam clearly hears and knows the voice of God. In response to the call, he tries to free himself from the bonds of orthodoxy and culture; to sell his land and arrange for relatives to care for his family.

When Sam receives a letter from his brother, John, who is in Paraguay, he comes to know of the lives of David Epps [2] and [3]. Sam holds these men in his mind as

examples of lives lived authentically for others, and becomes even more determined to fulfill his injunction from God. Care for his family, which up until now had been all he lived for, fades to insignificance in the force of his now increasing need to act for others:

"That's all I lived for. The kids, yeah, they're ours, mine and Emily's, and they've got to be cared for, yes, I know that, that's how my parents lived too. Care for the children God has given you. Sure. But . . . maybe they wouldn't be such brats if I hadn't always been just working for them so much. They're not everything in heaven and on earth. Compared to some things, they're maybe nothing much at all. I don't know . . . If . . . they could see, when they're old enough to see, that I was doing something needed. You know, that had to be, for others, not just so our family has it softer."(77)

Sam's thoughts betray a desire to act that reflects the influence of the example of David Epp [2]. He is thinking that if he, like David Epp [2], acted for "others," perhaps he would influence his own children to live an authentic existence, as resulted with David Epp [3].

Sam also recalls from his own childhood the statement of David Epp [1] to his father: "'Ernst, I think Mrs. Friesen was praying, too.'" It reminds Sam, and the reader as well, of the ineffectiveness of an idle, family-centered faith. Thus, Wiebe again emphasizes that the old world Mennonite concern for one's family alone does not add up to a Christian life.

Sam's efforts to act are thwarted by his own community. No one will buy his land, care for his family, or even notarize his passport. In contrast to Sam's struggle to live for others, Wiebe portrays Sam's community in much the same colours as he does the

Mennonites of Pre-Revolution Russia. They are an ignorant, complacent, and materialistic people. The portrait reiterates a familiar theme: "Acquiring land, keeping it, or working it can lead to spiritual callousness." (78) These people are so entrenched in tradition-fed orthodoxy, that they simply think Sam has gone mad. They can no more understand authentic existence than they can fly unassisted. Sam's wife, in particular, is thoroughly materialistic.

Even the pastor is thoroughly partisan to the community's way of thinking. He, who prefers the solid rationality of modern science to the voice of God, believes that God's voice does not speak to the individual in modern society. (79) The pastor's insistence on testing the voice of God against modern technology points ironically to the inadequacy of both rational science and the modern Mennonite pastor as measures of truth. So, Wiebe points a wagging finger of judgement at not only the recurring iniquities of landed Mennonite society, but at modern science and technology as well.

In the end, the community succeeds in keeping Sam within the community boundaries. Sam fails to make the transition to authentic existence. (80) Helpless against the "rubber wall" of the community, he returns to the land "for good." (81) In returning to the land, Sam gives up and soon dies. On his deathbed, regret is with him still: "'When I heard the voice, I should have gone. Left a note and gone.'" (82)

In chapter twelve, "The Vietnam call of Sam U. Reimer," Wiebe demonstrates again that the land seduces people to ignorance, selfishness, and faithlessness. Likewise, to live solely concerned for one's family--working so they have it softer--is not a Christian life either. The chapter is also an example of the transforming effect of true Christian action on the lives of others. Although he has met only one of them, the exemplary lives of all three David Epps influence Sam to believe in the necessity of following God's call.

In many respects, Sam's younger brother, John, picks up the task that Sam is unable to complete. For in John, we see a more complete progression from traditional, cultural Mennonitism to an authentic Christian way of thinking.

When we first meet John in chapter eleven, "Wash, This Sand and Ashes," he has already broken away from the colony lifestyle that Sam failed to escape. But much of his thinking remains within the orthodoxy of Mennonite tradition, albeit in a modernized form. For example, he relies on thought/training as a means of redemption, and it is a kind of thinking that remains thoroughly land-oriented.

John regards himself as an enlightened individual:

He knew himself, he thought; he was university trained, a professional who could help people live with the land, help it live for them; . . . he knew himself broad-minded, perceptive, understanding; he had built his enlightenment deliberately, . . . (83)

John believes his education is his instrument of

redemption--not from sin, but from the sin of ignorance and myopic thinking characteristic of colonial Mennonites. His education, however, is land-oriented; he is an agriculturalist. Thus his thinking remains land-directed as well. For example, although John has left the colony lifestyle to perform useful missionary work among the Indians of Paraguay, his answer to the problems of the nomadic tribes is that they must settle and learn to farm.(84) It is only when John comes into contact with the Epp family that he begins to see the inadequacy of his own thinking.

The influence of the David Epps upon John is especially evident on the occasion when David [3] and John encounter the wounded Ayerooa chief. John tries desperately to think of a way to save the man's life--his body; meanwhile, David [3] already knows the futility of any such attempt. He confronts John with a harsh reality: "'Try. An Ayerooa with one leg.'"(85) David, whose main concern is for the spiritual welfare of these people, knows that the nomadic, hunting lifestyle of the Ayerooas would make it impossible for the chief to survive with his integrity intact. His simple statement forces home to John that technology--doctors and new farming methods--is not the way to save these Indians. As John continues to work in the shadow of David Epp's "infallible direction" and exemplary life, he begins to become aware of two things; i.e., the true nature of real Christian discipleship, and how far short of this ideal his own

enlightenment has led him.

While in Paraguay, John is also influenced by another member of the Epp family. As the receiver of Franz Epp's tale of the abduction of Jacob IV, John comes to recognize the negative possibilities of Mennonite faith; in particular, his own father's "nose-aimed myopia."

At the end of chapter eleven, John is no longer confident of his enlightenment: "So much seemed to move in so many directions he could not gather together what, except at times seemed simply his own dumbfounded incomprehension about life and people." (86)

When he emerges in chapter thirteen, "On the Way," his way of life and thinking--his faith--has drastically changed. John explains:

"I had done what I thought were good things, studied the Bible, taken agriculture at university, gone to land-poor countries and tried to show them how to grow things: . . . when my brother died in Manitoba and I came back and I felt it had to go different, I had to think different, somehow." (87)

So it is the crisis of Sam's death that finally pushes John's mind in a new direction. The motivation, perhaps, comes not so much from Sam's death as from the legacy of his unfulfilled mission: "The legacy left by one Reimer to another is not the familiar world of reassuring literal relation but rather the legacy of an urgent task." (88)

John picks up the task Sam is unable to complete. And herein, one can again witness Wiebe's use of Biblical analogy. Sam is essentially an Old Testament figure, a prophet called to the wilderness in the Abrahamic sense.

And just as the New Testament interprets the oracles of the Old Testament, so John interprets his brother's divine call and responds in a typologically New Testament way. Rather than resolving to go to Vietnam, John emerges in chapter thirteen dragging a huge wooden cross across the Canadian prairie.

John has become, quite literally, a Christ-imitator. One should not, however, confuse this image with a Christ figure. Symbolically, John does not fulfill a Christ-like role.(89) Wiebe makes this clear through John's own words about himself: "I am a human being walking. That's all. . . . Just a tired, dying human being, walking the land.'"(90) He performs neither an atoning nor redeeming function. John's self-description also illustrates the extreme change in his self-perception. His previous confidence in his enlightenment and broad-mindedness is conspicuously absent.

Although scholarly interpretations of the symbolic value of Reimer's action vary considerably, in respect of Wiebe's essential message about Anabaptist faith and the land, John's cross-carrying imitatio is symbolic of the Anabaptist way of discipleship in *Nachfolge Christi* (following Christ in imitation). Furthermore, although symbolic of the way of Anabaptist discipleship, John is not actually an incarnation of it. The radical self-sacrificing action of the David Epps is not evident in the behavior of John Reimer. More accurately, he is an

apostolic-type figure. That is, he is the bearer of a message or, if you will, a proponent of the cause of Anabaptist discipleship. Seen in this way, John's cross-carrying action becomes a reflection of his message. This apostolic function of John's character is especially evident in chapter 13:II, the gathering in the ditch.

Before proceeding to the events of that scene, first consider the setting. It is essentially a barren wilderness type of setting--opposite of the blue mountains. As such, it is indicative of John Reimer's reformed attitude. He has rejected both the isolated colony lifestyle of traditional, ethnic Mennonitism, and its work ethic of making the land prosper: "Reimer knows that 'building the land' (227) is no key to peace or salvation. . . . neither things grown on the land nor the land itself necessarily brings peace." (91) Instead of working the land, John now walks to "feel the land." (92) As the setting reflects, John has become a landless, rootless individual; he is alone in the wilderness.

Like John Reimer, all of the Mennonites who gather in the ditch have left behind both traditional Mennonite ways and the land. They are a modern version of the runners, hidiers, and liars that we met in "Sons and Heirs." All of them are urban dwellers--the new landless--and all of them are rootless. Wiebe effectively portrays their rootlessness in images of flight. Be it in Cadillacs or airplanes, all of these people are in flight across the land and away from the land. They are also in

flight from their pasts. The Williams/Willms family, Elizabeth Cereno/Driedger, and Jacob Friesen IV are all hiding their common ancestry behind English or Spanish names, or professed atheism. Moreover, they are all lying to themselves that they are satisfied with their current lifestyle.

Notably, none of the characters present in the ditch are fully committed in faith. Neither Frieda Friesen nor the David Epps participate in this scene. The gathering is a communion of the displaced, a regrouping of the lost Mennonites from Russia, Paraguay, and Canada. They are the landless gathered in the wilderness; and, like the lost and landless in No Strangers in Exile, what they receive is not a promise of restoration to the land. Rather, through the voice of John Reimer, they are given word.

Reimer's message to this group is a call to authentic existence, as Wiebe envisions it. It is a call to reject the institutional church of colonial Mennonitism: "' . . . a church that can never change no matter where on earth or in what century it is, a church that's never as important to us as living, as eating, as making our pile, that's there a few hours a Sunday . . . to keep us decent as our parents all told us.'"(93) It is a call to "think differently" by following the example given us in the life and teachings of Jesus.

John Reimer's "sermon" to the gathering in the ditch is also Wiebe's "sermon" to the reader. Like those

gathered in the ditch, the reader is compelled to confront the nature of their own existence in comparison to Wiebe's ideal of Christian faith and life. The reader must answer for himself Wiebe's call to authentic existence.(94)

It is also important to recognize that, in addition to John's speech about an ideal Jesus society, his words contain an element of social criticism. For, in this respect, John's apostolic message is actually a distillation of the entire novel. As we have seen, throughout the novel Wiebe always combines his vision of the ideal with a critique of society as it exists in Russia, Paraguay, and Canada. This combination is basic to Wiebe's view of Christianity: "One of the fundamental strands in Wiebe's fiction is, . . . a Christianity that combines criticism of the world as it is with a vision of the world as it might be."(95) In the case of the Mennonites, the message is clearly about land, as becomes evident in the final conversation between John Reimer and Jacob Friesen IV.

Chapter 13:III is a masterpiece of innuendo and allusion. Virtually all of the significant events and symbols of the novel are reiterated in this final section. In terms of typology, this finale is a confrontation between Old Testament and New Testament typological "ways of thinking," with Jacob IV and John Reimer as their respective representatives. However, as the chapter title notifies us, these men are "on the way"; neither of them is a fully realized representative of their type. Jacob

IV, although a survivor from the old world who once thought in old world ways, now professes a cynical atheism and estrangement from the Mennonites. And John Reimer, although professing the way to think differently, is not fully committed in action.

In keeping with the theme of "on the way," a key conversation in this section centers around the word "possibility." In allusion to the fugitive's mysterious reply to Jacob IV in chapter eight, John Reimer also responds to Jacob IV's cynicism in terms of possibility: ". . . as long as I am alive the possibility can never be completely closed that God is good.'"(96)

Jacob IV responds, as he did in chapter eight, with continued doubt: "'Ah-h-h. If there is one.'" John Reimer replies: "'That possibility cannot be closed either.'"(97)

At this point, the conversation is interrupted by sounds from nature. Considering the total scenario, Wiebe here makes a profound statement about faith and the land. The two men are both landless and rootless, wandering in a barren wilderness, discussing the possibility of God's existence and goodness. Then, in reply to their queries, it is the land itself that speaks.

The wail of the coyote, followed by Reimer's quotation of the last lines from Sheila Watson's The Double Hook, is a small masterpiece on Wiebe's part. The coyote in The Double Hook is Trickster; the animal who, in Indian lore, permits man to experience the thrills of

utopian existence, while all the time revealing the necessity of place as that which gives life meaning and order.(98) At the end of The Double Hook, Trickster's final words--which John Reimer recites--refer to the protagonist's return to ordered place.(99) Thus Wiebe declares that landlessness is, after all, place and not chaos. The notion is confirmed by the second voice from the land--the wind:

The giant wind which in "Sons and Heirs" had gutted the Friesen house leaving only the facade fronting the street(p.23) now stirs once again; "the slope rustled as from feet" and God's presence on the prairie is confirmed.(100)

Clearly, the voice of God is heard in the wilderness.

Immediately following the voices from the land, Reimer and Friesen discuss the Mennonites' "Jewishness" and desire for promised land. Reimer, in keeping with his New Testament typology, states that promised land is "Nowhere on earth."(101) As a consequence of this realization and his new way of thinking, Reimer changes the direction of his walk. Instead of going west into the mountains, symbol of promised land, he heads north into nothingness. He explains: "'The mountains. They look so nice, . . . almost like a new world, sharp, beautiful, clean. But usually when you get over there's always more of what you climbed to get away from. So one morning I started north.'"(102) His experience of the mountains duplicates that of David Epp [2] and, more importantly, summarizes one of Wiebe's main themes in the novel.

Using John Reimer as his mouthpiece, Wiebe makes

it abundantly clear that land is not a requirement for Anabaptist Christian faith. Rather, promised land is an illusion of Mennonite history and culture or of their old world, Old Testament type of thinking and living. John summarizes Wiebe's perspective:

"That's the trouble with Mennonites; they show it clearer than most other Christians, especially Protestants. They wish they were, if they could only be Jews. On the mountain Moses said, 'Go over that river, there's the land God has given you forever,' but Jesus just said, 'I'm going to make a place ready for you and then I'll come and get you. You wait.' Moses gave his people manna to eat when they were hungry, and Jesus did that a little but then he changed. Then he just said, 'I'm bread enough for you. Remember me.'" (103)

The conclusion of the novel is ambiguous. The reader never knows if Jacob IV is convinced by John Reimer's words. The book remains open-ended, as the Bible and history are open-ended. In light of Wiebe's authorial intention to fulfill a pedagogical function, the ending is appropriate (104):

After the last paragraph, the reader expectantly turns the page, only to discover that the tale is over. But then, in the slow light of reflection, he begins to realize that the form of conclusion for The Blue Mountains of China was a sudden perception, grasped in the shadow of another Book, of vast, unbroken emptiness. That the end is not yet . . . And that is the essential story-teller's trick in Wiebe's fiction--its prophetic invitation to activate choices for the future. (105)

Like the Bible itself, Wiebe's open-ended conclusion motivates the reader to make a choice--a personal response to a call to faith/authentic existence. Critic Ina Ferris criticizes this aspect of the novel as a weakness. She contends that John Reimer's sermon, in particular, forces the reader into a participation that

allows "no retreat from the fictional experience." (106) However, in light of Wiebe's Anabaptist vision, it can be seen that Ferris' "no choice" is also a choice. That is, the reader is given no choice but to make a choice--about Wiebe's Christianity and human morality in general. Remaining true to his Biblical model, Wiebe's novel is a call that requires a response. Hence, what Ferris criticizes as weakness is more truly the strength of the novel.

VI.

Wiebe's story of the Mennonites is as rich in meaning as it is complex in structure. By dividing the novel into family histories, we have seen how each family embraces a certain Biblical type that characterizes their way of thinking or faith. Accordingly, each type experiences a corresponding relation to the land. Each of these family genealogies moves confluent toward the final chapter, wherein the dispersed Mennonite "family" is reunited in the wilderness, and Wiebe's own message about Mennonite Christianity is expounded.

The Jacob and Isaak Friesen families represent the Old Testament Jewish experiences of longing for land, having land, and losing land. The Jacob Friesens are the landed of Russia--graspers and supplanters who are cast out of the land. They suffer the end of history in the land, and Jacob IV experiences the suffering and

alienation of exile. Their faith of "taking thought" cannot sustain them, and land-loss leads them to doubt and despair, or death.

The Isaak Friesens, on the other hand, are landless from the beginning of their story. Their pilgrimage across the Canadian prairie and finally to the Paraguayan Chaco is a journey of faith, which is always strong with hope and trust. But their search for a promised land remains unfulfilled. The Paraguayan Chaco fails to yield the prosperity and security of a genuine garden. However, their faith, and the acceptance of all things in the name of that faith, rarely falters. Although, as a "thoughtless faith", neither does it inspire or transform the lives of others.

Wiebe depicts landed Mennonite societies in Russia, Paraguay, and Canada as ignorant, racist, and/or materialistic. Preoccupation with the land ends in spiritual complacency and callousness. Mennonite life on isolated colonies, governed by a church that is mostly a cultural/ethnic institution, is subject to Wiebe's condemnation as a denial of Christian responsibility.

In the David Epp family, we see Wiebe's ideal of Christian faith brought to life. Their concern to love all humans as brothers compels them to abandon the traditional Mennonite values of land and family in favor of Christ-imitating action. Typologically, they are New Testament disciple figures, whose actions stem from personal choice and who inspire others to more authentic

lives of faith.

The Sam Reimer family are those whose lives are changed by the David Epps. No distinct genealogical type exists for this family. Sam Reimer/Balzar is a runner, hider, and liar of the Jacob Friesen mold, while Sam U. Reimer is an Old Testament prophet figure. The character of John Reimer carries the reader through the process of change from traditional Mennonite to Wiebe's modern Anabaptist ways of thinking. His faith is transformed from one that is land-oriented to one that lives in the understanding that the real spiritual quest is inner.

At the end of the novel, John emerges as a New Testament apostle-type figure. He is the bearer of a message, the word. This message he delivers to the displaced and landless who are gathered in the wilderness. So, the landless never receive a promise of restoration to the land, their gift is the word. The promised land--utopia in isolation--is nowhere on earth. The Mennonite quest, the human quest, is inner.

Wiebe always portrays the land as an inhibitor to faith. It lures the Mennonites into faithlessness or into a rigid ethnicity and traditionalism that stifles faith and denies love to its brother. Herein Wiebe's view of Christianity is explicated. It is a combination of a vision of a church community (versus colony) that is a vibrant new society of followers of Jesus, tempered with a realistic and critical examination of society as it exists.

Regarding Walter Brueggemann's categories of histories of landedness and landlessness, much of Wiebe's depiction of the Mennonites is true to this form. In the Jacob Friesen genealogy, we observe that grasping the land leads to loss of land, which ends in alienation, despair, or death. Wiebe's portrayal of landed Mennonite society also reflects Brueggemann's analysis of the landed society of Israel. In the Isaak Friesen family history, we observe a wandering in the wilderness motif similar to the Israelites' wandering in the desert. In the state of landlessness, the Isaak Friesens trust and wait for the gift of land.

At this point, Wiebe diverges from Walter Brueggemann's gift/grasp dialectic regarding the land. For those who are landless do not ever receive the gift of land. The Isaak Friesens never know the security and prosperity of a true promised land. The blue mountains are proven to be an illusion created by Mennonite history and culture.

Wiebe also moves out of Brueggemann's dialectic in presenting his own ideal of Christian faith. Faith is a matter of individual spirit in confrontation with the word of God--as we see in the conversions of David Epp [2] and Sam and John Reimer. Thus, over against the historical, ethnic, land-bound faith of traditional colonial Mennonite life, Wiebe affirms an existential type of Christianity that involves individual decision and results in action or, at least, a changed way of thinking. This view of

Christian faith surfaced previously in Peace Shall Destroy Many. It is also very similar to the view of Hans Harder in No Strangers in Exile. Both authors advocate a Christianity that is existential in nature in that they both emphasize the spiritual, personal aspects of faith experiences as opposed to the traditional, institutional, or ethnic. It is in the barren wilderness, where alienation and rootlessness characterize existence, that the word of God is heard and true faith can be lived.

NOTES

1. Keith, W. J., Epic Fiction: The Art of Rudy Wiebe (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981), p. 42.

2. See H. R. Pellman, Review of The Blue Mountains of China, by Rudy Wiebe, Mennonite Quarterly Review (July 1982): 312-314.

3. Magdalene Falk-Redekop, "Translated into the Past: Language in The Blue Mountains of China," in A Voice in the Land, ed. W. J. Keith, (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), p. 105.

4. Critics Al Reimer and D. W. Doerksen find this a negative element of the book. See Al Reimer, "Rudy Wiebe," Mennonite Mirror, September 1971, p. 7f. and D. W. Doerksen, review of The Blue Mountains of China, by Rudy Wiebe, Fiddlehead 88 (Winter 1971): 98-102.

5. Redekop, in Voice, p. 97f.

6. Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), pp. 498f.

7. Rudy Wiebe, The Blue Mountains of China (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970; New Canadian Library, 1975), pp. 182-184.

8. Keith, Epic, p. 56.

9. Allan Dueck, "Rudy Wiebe as Storyteller: Vision and Art in Wiebe's Fiction," M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1974, pp. 54-60.

10. David L. Jeffrey, "A Search for Peace: Prophecy and Parable in the Fiction of Rudy Wiebe," in A Voice in the Land, ed. W. J. Keith, (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), p. 186.

11. Ibid., p. 188.

12. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 227.

13. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 35.

14. George Hildebrand, "The Anabaptist Vision of Rudy Wiebe: A Study in Theological Allegoresis," Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, 1982, p. 133.

15. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 14.
16. Ibid., p. 23.
17. Ibid., pp. 34, 35.
18. Ibid., p. 31.
19. Ibid., pp. 28, 39.
20. Ibid., pp. 34, 35.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 35.
23. Ibid., p. 41.
24. Ibid., pp. 35, 39.
25. Ibid., p. 20.
26. Ibid., p. 27.
27. See Chapter Two of this thesis.
28. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 28.
29. Ibid., pp. 105f.
30. Ibid., p. 107.
31. Ibid., p. 114.
32. Ibid., p. 115.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., pp. 193, 196, 222.
35. Vicky Schreiber Dill, "Land Relatedness in the Mennonite Novels of Rudy Wiebe," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1982, p. 123.
36. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," p. 142.
37. Wiebe, Mountains, pp. 16, 19, 30, 33.
38. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," pp. 142, 143.
39. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 32.
40. Ibid., p. 23.
41. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," pp. 146, 147.

42. Psalm 49 as abbreviated by Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," p. 147.
43. Schreiber Dill, "Land Relatedness," p. 122. See also chapters two and four of this thesis.
44. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 9.
45. Ibid., p. 47.
46. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," p. 135.
47. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 10.
48. Ibid., p. 147.
49. Ibid., p. 97.
50. Ibid., p. 148.
51. Ibid., pp. 98-101.
52. Ibid., p. 100.
53. Ibid.
54. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," p. 150.
55. Scholars W. J. Keith and Vicky Schreiber Dill interpret the chapter in this way.
56. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 104.
57. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," pp. 137-139.
58. Ibid., p. 137.
59. Ibid., p. 139.
60. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 63.
61. Ibid., p. 66.
62. Ibid., pp. 138, 171, 172.
63. Redekop, in Voice, p. 107.
64. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 125.
65. Ibid., p. 132.
66. Ibid., p. 129.
67. Ibid., p. 124.

68. Ibid., pp. 12, 138.
69. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 131.
70. Ibid., pp. 131-132.
71. Ibid., pp. 140.
72. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," p. 157.
73. Wiebe, Mountains, pp. 171, 172.
74. Jeffrey, in Voice, p. 489.
75. Wiebe, Mountains, pp. 167, 169.
76. Ibid., p. 158.
77. Ibid., 170.
78. Schreiber Dill, "Land Relatedness," p. 122.
79. Wiebe, Mountains, pp. 165, 176.
80. R. P. Bilan, "Wiebe and Religious Struggle," Canadian Literature 77 (Summer 1978): 59, 60. Bilan maintains that Sam's life is a failure because he fails to act on his belief.
81. Wiebe, Mountains, pp. 174, 178.
82. Ibid., p. 179.
83. Ibid., p. 155.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., p. 153.
86. Ibid., p. 155.
87. Ibid., p. 222.
88. Redekop, in Voice, p. 120.
89. Keith, Epic, p. 60.
90. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 225.
91. Schreiber Dill, "Land Relatedness," p. 131.
92. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 194.
93. Ibid., p. 215.
94. See Donald Cameron, "The Moving Stream is

Perfectly at Rest," in Conversations with Canadian Novelists--2 (Toronto: Macmillan and Co., 1973).

95. Dueck, "Storyteller," p. 53.

96. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 225.

97. Ibid., p. 226.

98. Sam Gill, Native American Religions (California: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1982), pp. 28, 29.

99. Sheila Watson, The Double Hook (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1959).

100. Hildebrand, "Allegoresis," p. 165.

101. Wiebe, Mountains, p. 227.

102. Ibid., pp. 226, 227.

103. Ibid., p. 227.

104. See Cameron, "Moving Stream."

105. Jeffrey, in Voice, p. 192.

106. Ina Ferris, "Religious Vision and Fictional Form: Rudy Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China," in Voice, pp. 92, 94.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

I.

Through the artists' creative imagination we are allowed a sudden turning back to sight along the foreshortened profile of a generation or centuries-long continuum. Its meaning grips us with involuntary recognition. The artist has conferred on us his capacity to apprehend depth meanings in the miscellaneous welter of a communal memory. He shares with us his sense of the myth of an ethos. He directs our attention to its drama: what it has done, what has happened and what that has meant. (1)

The above passage summarizes well the starting point of this study. The literature we have examined contains both a reflection of and a contribution to the understanding of Mennonite experience and identity. The stories reflect back to the reader images of a common history, humanity, and historical identity. The books also contain messages of particular relevance--a how-it-should-be--that can be regarded as a contribution to the ongoing process of cultural and religious self-understanding that is inevitable in a world of change. Literature is about life--life as it was, and is, and how it might be. And so by studying this art form, we can discover meanings about the nature of a people's religious experience. For, as Gordon Kaufman affirms: "It is through art that people betray their real faith." (2) By examining four novels written by Mennonites about Mennonite life, this has been our essential quest;

i.e., to discover how these authors portray Mennonite life, and what can be discovered from these portrayals about Mennonite faith and faith identity in relation to the land

In pursuit of this end, I have chosen Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the Biblical relation of land and faith as a paradigm for interpreting the authors' presentations of the relation of land and faith in Mennonite experience. This technique was chosen for three reasons: 1) the Mennonites live a Biblical faith and subsequently understand themselves to a large extent in Biblical terms. The authors' use of Biblical analogy, allusion, and typology reflects this aspect of Mennonite self-understanding; 2) Walter Brueggemann's interpretation of the Bible from the perspective of the relation of land and faith correlates with our interpretive intention regarding the selected literature. Therefore, his work is a relevant and helpful aid in defining and understanding the authors' use of Biblical material; 3) this technique focuses our analysis on the Mennonites' experience of land and its impact on their faith. Each author's portrait of Mennonite life and faith is examined in the context of histories of landedness and landlessness, of gift and grasp. In each work, the Mennonites live a particular relation to the land that both influences and is influenced by their faith and faith identity. And so, we can discern a message about Mennonite faith identity and the land. Let us briefly review our findings.

II.

A Russian Dance of Death. by Dietrich

Neufeld, is a portrayal of landed society losing the land. As a result of the Russian Revolution, the Mennonites experience the end of life as a landed people or the end of history in the land. The Mennonites lose the land and suffer the collapse of all the structures that provided meaning and identity in their lives. They endured the destruction of their farms, families, churches, and often the colony itself. An inevitable result of these losses is that the people's faith, culture, and identity become confused and uncertain.

Neufeld documents three basic reactions to the loss of land: despair, self-defense, and yearning for new land. Although sympathetic with those who fall to despair, Neufeld is harshly critical of those who resort to the use of arms. In his mind, this action is indicative of apostasy.

Drawing on Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites' experience of land-loss, we discovered various common elements, that consequently raised the question of whether the Mennonites' land was lost because faith had become apostasy. Like the Israelites, the prosperity and security of life in the land seduced the Mennonites' faith away from the way of the suffering church and brotherly love, to materialism, selfishness, and complacency. For both peoples, preoccupation with the

land, and material wealth from the land resulted in bitter social strife. In short, the Mennonites of A Russian Dance of Death and the Israelites of Brueggemann's analysis are portrayed as people who become graspers of the land to the neglect of their principles of faith.

Neufeld's own viewpoint is closely alligned to this perspective. In his books, he is critical of his fellow Mennonites for their preoccupation with the land. Variously, he describes the colonists as ignorant, selfish, and unbrotherly. The Mennonites' Christian faith was weak, allowing injustice and greed to overrule brotherly love in land management practices. He clearly affirms that brotherly love and the Anabaptist faith traditions of pacifism and the suffering church are more important than keeping the land.

Neufeld, himself, favors leaving the land altogether. In the tradition of his early forefathers, he eventually abandons the land, placing all his hope in the prospect of freedom on new land. In his view, the land of the present is lost forever; faith and life can continue only on new land. So, he flees the land that his people have called home for 150 years. By his escape, Neufeld relives the landless/wanderer tradition of his Anabaptist heritage, and he also fulfills his hope. When he reaches new land, he experiences a renewal of life and faith.

From the circumstances of landed society losing the land, we turn to a portrait of Mennonite life

lived in the landlessness following the end of history in the land. In No Strangers in Exile, by Hans Harder, Mennonites from the Volga region of southern Russia are exiled to the northern forests of Archangel where they struggle with existence as a landless people. The condition of life for these exiles is characterized by a radical discontinuity with the past, a deep sense of alienation from both God and companions, and a meaninglessness of life known as weariness.

The exiles feel a strong nostalgia for the security and well-being they knew in their old way of life in the land. In their struggle to find meaning and support for faith, they attempt to forge a continuity between past and present by enacting the traditions and rituals of that landed existence. As we have seen, their attempts fail. In the condition of landlessness, the traditions of landed existence do not yield security. Like their wealth, the Mennonites' historical identity cannot be transported from the garden to the desert.

Only when historical identity is abandoned--when their struggle turns to resignation and "nothingness"--do faith and hope once again become strong. Out of the death of their old way of life and thought, Harms, Wolff, and Koehn experience a resurrection into a new faith and a new history. By surrendering human spirit to God's Word, these men discover spiritual peace and a new feeling of "at-homeness." Their focus of reality shifts from the past to the present. And appropriately,

their new faith is unconnected to the ethnic idiosyncracies of isolation, exclusivity, and land.

Harder's vision of Christian faith is expressed mainly through the actions and words of the two paragons, Ohm Peters and Father Nikolai, and through the resurrection experience at the end of the novel. From these expressions, we determined that Harder's vision of Christian faith is confrontational, individual, and spirit-centered in nature and experience. In these respects, it is more existential than traditional, insitutional, or ethnic. Harder clearly affirms that neither land nor colonies nor ethnic exclusivity are necessary for Christian living. In landlessness, old identifications with the land atrophy and are replaced by a new religious perspective in which spirit enables survival.

In Peace Shall Destroy Many, we observed much the same Christian ideal as Harder's, but in an entirely different setting. Opposite of the landless, suffering Mennonites of exile, the Mennonites of Wapiti are essentially a landed and prosperous society. The older generation of citizens are Mennonites who escaped the grave of Russia and, to some extent, have re-established on Canadian soil, the peaceful isolated type of existence they had known in Russia prior to the Revolution. Deacon Block is particularly preoccupied with the idea of rebuilding a pure and peaceful community such as he

thought existed during the "Golden Age" of Russia. His character type is a revivification of the landowners of the Russian colonies and also the Biblical land manager, King Solomon. The Deacon is a kingly land manager who succumbs to the folly inherent in land management; i. e., he regards the land as his own to manipulate according to his will and forgets that God always possesses the land.

Through the character of Thom Wiens and others of the second generation, Wiebe exposes the inadequacy of the Deacon's attitude. Herb and Hank Unger, and Elizabeth and Pete Block simply rebel against the Deacon's rules; while Thom, under the guidance of Joseph Dueck, struggles to get beyond rebellion to understanding. It is Joseph who shows Thom that peace is not achieved by isolation and avoidance, and that brotherly love can only be truly lived in positive action.

At the end of the novel, Thom comes to know the truth of Joseph's words. He learns that the way of peace and love is not lived by avoidance and isolation. He becomes enlightened to the reality that a Christian's life is lived by following the teachings of Jesus, not the Deacon's ordinances.

Much like Hans Harder, Wiebe's message about Christianity and the land is that faith is a matter of individual, spiritual confrontation with God's Word, and is lived in positive actions of brotherly love and humanitarian concern. The Mennonite traditions of ethnicity, isolation on the land, and preoccupation with

the land are shown to inhibit or overwhelm these essentials of Christian faith.

The Deacon's attempt to use the wilderness to isolate and insulate Wapiti from the world, does not create or preserve an enclave of the spiritually pure. Likewise, a prosperous yield from the land does not necessarily reflect itself in the human spirit--rich land does not make a righteous soul. In fact, among the citizens of Wapiti, concern for land is inversely proportional to concern for brother. The Deacon's order of priorities clearly places the land before the welfare of his neighbors. At the opposite extreme, Joseph Dueck readily forsakes the land to show love to his brother.

Wiebe also uses the wilderness land motif to demonstrate that both peace and violence or evil are states of the inner spirit. The wilderness holds potential for the creation of a paradise or a prison--a wilderness wasteland or garden. In connection with this idea, the wilderness becomes a place of confrontation where the soul meets both the good and evil within itself. In Peace Shall Destroy Many, the state of each person's soul is revealed through their attitude to the land and land management. By this device, Wiebe stresses how, in landed society, land management is a central factor in Mennonite religious life.

Walter Brueggemann's gift/grasp dialectic also helps to inform us about attitudes of land management in Peace Shall Destroy Many. The Deacon is a

grasper of the land, who regards the land as his own possession. Thom, on the other hand, comes to recognize the land as independent from the Mennonites who work it and, therefore, as a gift. As it is with kings who manage the land, the Deacon's rule is broken and he loses the land. Conversely, Thom, who discerns the true spirit of Christian life, comes to a new understanding of the land of Wapiti as home.

The Mennonites' various histories of landedness and landlessness come together in Rudy Wiebe's epic novel, The Blue Mountains of China. Through the accounts of several family histories, Wiebe presents the reader with three contrasting ways of life and faith. Each of the three ways of thinking are based on Biblical typologies, each with their own corresponding perception of the land.

The Jacob Friesens are graspers and supplanters who own and manage the land with a kingly greed and selfishness. Their faith is a matter of training or disciplined thought. However, their thoughts neither console nor motivate them when their land is lost. Their thoughts and memories and prayers do not affect their actions. In the end, when their land is lost, they descend into apostasy and skepticism.

The Isaak Friesens are blind trusters who, although landless, live an undying hope that they shall one day arrive at their promised land. Their faith is

strong and steadfast, enabling them to accept all the tragedies and blessings in their life as from God. But theirs is a thoughtless faith. It sustains them individually, but the Frieda Friesens neither motivate nor inspire others to a faith in God. Nor is their faith rewarded with the gift of promised land. Instead, their pilgrimage ends in the "green hell" of Paraguay; where, as in Canada, they continue to be defeated by the land.

The David Epps exemplify Wiebe's vision of true Christian discipleship in action. They are sincere men whose Christ-imitating actions of brotherly love inspire others to more authentic lives of faith. Correspondingly, none of these men are agriculturalists, nor do they show any interest in having or keeping land. Their concern is always for the inner being or spirit of all human beings. In this respect, the David Epps are typologically non-traditional Mennonite. Their attitudes are non-ethnic, non-land oriented, and non-isolationist. Rather, their actions stem from personal decisions of faith, and the impossible task of imitating Christ. Moreover, in contrast to the other family groups who cannot inspire others, the David Epps motivate others to live more authentically in the way of Christ.

The colonies of Mennonites in Russia, Paraguay, and Canada are all portrayed in the dark shades of criticism. They are variously presented as ignorant, complacent, materialistic, and racist. Wiebe's critical evaluations reiterate the same ideas we observed in Peace

Shall Destroy Many; that is, that the traditional ethnic Mennonite lifestyle, concerned with isolation on the land and prosperity from the land, builds no harbor of spiritual insight or peace. More accurately, it is an irresponsible denial of Christ's teaching of brotherly love.

Through John Reimer's voice in the last chapter, it becomes especially clear that Wiebe's vision of true Christian faith involves the individual spirit responding to the Word of God in decision and action. It does not merely involve ethnic traditions, an institutional religious life, or an agricultural vocation; nor is it fulfilled by living in isolated colonies. The speeches of John Reimer also summarize the dual aspect of Wiebe's view of Christian faith and life that the novel as a whole expresses. Wiebe's Christian "way of thinking" includes both a critical, realistic view of society as it exists, and a vision of Christian life that is based on following Christ in imitation. The fact that the displaced and landless Mennonites gathered in the ditch around Reimer's cross receive, not a promise of restoration to the land, but the word on how to think differently, clearly indicates that Wiebe's ideal of faith excludes the notion of promised land.

III.

Focusing specifically on the Mennonites' experience of the land, each of the authors' portrayals of

Mennonite history and life, in many respects, parallels Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the Old Testament experience of land. Collectively, the works create a story of the Mennonites that, like the story of the Israelites, can be seen as a series of histories of relation to the land: of yearning for land, managing the land, and losing the land. Within each of these histories we can also see that the religious attitudes and experiences of the Mennonites also parallel Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites.

According to Dietrich Neufeld in A Russian Dance of Death, the situation of landedness in Pre-Revolution Russia bred increasingly callous and materialistic colonists. The necessity of managing the land led to a preoccupation with the land that fostered attitudes of land ownership which, in turn, ended in materialistic and selfish land barons. Their faith deteriorated enough to allow social strife and injustice to grow in their communities--as the Israelites did in Canaan. For both societies, land ownership ends in loss of the land and exile.

From Hans Harder's No Strangers in Exile, we determined that suffering, alienation, weariness, and meaninglessness describe the nature of human existence in the landlessness of exile. The people experience a complete discontinuity with the past. Such a radical break raises doubt--doubt of God's existence and benevolence. Some fall to despair and reject the God of

their history, others fight to remain steadfast in their faith, and still others know a faith of resignation that never wavers. Above all, however, the people of exile experience nostalgia. They yearn for the land and the landed existence of their irrecoverable past. As we have seen, this is the nature of landlessness for exiled Mennonites and Israelites alike.

When the Mennonites once again form landed societies in Canada and Paraguay, the attitudinal pattern of landedness repeats itself. Wiebe's Mennonites in Peace Shall Destroy Many are rebuilding the lifestyle of pre-Revolution Russia. And again, land management practices end in preoccupation with the land to the detriment of the way of peace and brotherly love. Wiebe's depiction of landed Mennonites in Paraguay and Canada in The Blue Mountains of China, similarly, exposes spiritually callous and complacent colonies of people, who think selfishly of isolation on the land and/or prosperity from the land. Thus, the relation of land and faith in the situation of landedness repeats itself. And, although the drastic consequence of exile does not occur in the new colonies, Wiebe nonetheless demonstrates how each group, in some way, loses the land. For example, the Paraguayan colonists are continually defeated by the land; and, in Canada, rich Mennonites die or crumble into powerlessness. Like the Mennonites in Russia, the Mennonites of landed societies in Canada and Paraguay who are preoccupied with land become selfish and lose the land.

We can conclude that distinct parallels exist between the authors' descriptions of Mennonite faith in relation to the land and Brueggemann's portrayal of the Israelites. What these parallels suggest is that the authors of this study portray the Mennonites' experience of land and faith as characteristically Old Testament. The Mennonites--like the Israelites--undergo a series of wanderings interspersed with periods of relative stability and prosperity in the land; and always, faith is held, shaped, and formed by the people's relation to the land.

However, each of the authors also include a vision of their ideal of Mennonite Christian faith and life. All of the authors decry faith that is lived with eyes to either the land of promise or the promises of the land. Moreover, the traditions of ethnic exclusivity and isolated colonies that developed in connection with the Mennonites' preoccupation with the land are presented as detrimental to an authentic life of faith. True faith is a matter of spirit, not geographical location.

Furthermore, the authors envision a Christian faith that centers on the decision of individual spirit in personal confrontation with the word of God. It emphasizes the existential and individual aspects of religious life as opposed to the traditional, institutional, and communal. Furthermore, the Anabaptist-Christian principles of the way of the suffering church, of brotherly love as extending to all human beings, of non-resistance as active participation

for peace in the world rather than avoidance of the world, and of discipleship as following Christ in imitation, all take precedence over agricultural vocation, colony, ethnicity, isolation, and land for living a Christian life.

The collective picture formed by these ideals is a typologically New Testament vision. It emphasizes spiritual life through active discipleship in imitation of Christ over against a secure place in the land. More specifically, it recalls the early Anabaptists' way of faith; or, the way of Mennonite faith and self-understanding before historical, ethnic, and cultural influences bound Mennonite faith to the land. As mentioned in chapter one, the early Anabaptists were a landless people. Appropriately, they understood their religious life in terms of the New Testament pilgrim idea.(3) They regarded themselves as wanderers who knew no home on earth, and whose real home lay beyond the grave.(4) Their faith contained no real connection to the land.

Consequently, if we now contemplate the novels we have analyzed as a reflection of and a contribution to a people's self-understanding, we can discern that these authors reflect the historical experience of Mennonite faith in relation to the land as characteristically Old Testament in type. Mennonites lived their faith with eyes and hearts set on a land of promise. Their histories in the land and in landlessness

demonstrate that their faith was shaped by their situation in the land, as Brueggemann shows is also the case for the Israelites. On the other hand, all of the Mennonite authors we have studied present an ideal of Christian faith that suggests that the Mennonites' true faith identity lies with the early Anabaptists' New Testament pilgrim-type identity. However, these conclusions create a certain difficulty.

IV.

As previously mentioned in chapters three and five of this thesis, our authors envision a Christian faith that appears contrary to Brueggemann's. Brueggemann affirms that Christian life must be lived embedded in history, community, and place in the land:

Radical decisions in obedience are of course the stuff of Biblical faith, but now it cannot be radical decisions in a private world without brothers and sisters, without pasts and futures, without turf to be managed and cherished as a partner in the decisions. The unit of decision-making is the community and always with reference to the land.(5)

On the other hand, the authors we have studied affirm precisely the opposite of what Brueggemann describes above. They emphasize the importance of individual decision and action in Christian discipleship, and portray the land and community as inhibitors to a true Christian life. Since Brueggemann's analysis of the Old Testament has proven an accurate and insightful aid in understanding the Mennonite literature, the issue of the land in relation to Christ deserves some further exploration.

As we have seen, in every situation of landlessness, the Mennonites do not receive a promise of restoration to the land--as Brueggemann claims is the case for Israel in exile. Rather, their gift is always word; word about how to perceive oneself and the world in order to be at peace in the inward spiritual sense of the term. For those who attain such peace, home becomes a place where the spirit is with God--whether the geographical location be a labor camp in Russia's far north, an isolated village in the bushland of Saskatchewan, or a ditch alongside the Trans-Canada highway. Accordingly, the meaning of home comes to designate one's spiritual place with God, without reference to land.

In this respect, it seems that only half of Brueggemann's gift/grasp dialectic is operative in the Mennonites' experience of land as we have seen it in the literature. As repeatedly evidenced, graspers of the land invariably lose it; but the displaced and landless experience no promise or gift of restoration to the land. Their gift is spiritual awareness. And indeed, one might logically reason that this discordance is fitting. The Mennonite authors, in envisioning authentic Mennonite faith, rely on New Testament/early Anabaptist typologies to call the Mennonites away from their Old Testament, "Jewish," history of faith bound to the land.

However, Walter Brueggemann suggests that the gift/grasp dialectic regarding the land is operative in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament.(6) In a

rather unique manner, Brueggemann interprets the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ to be the embodiment of the dialectic:

Crucifixion may be understood as a call to leave the old land (cf. Mark 10:17-22) and to give up power and embrace the risk of powerlessness and turflessness. Or conversely crucifixion is land-loss in order that others may receive the same land as gift.

Resurrection is the gift of power to the powerless (cf. Mark 5:1-20; Luke 19:1-10) and the invitation to the dispossessed to enter new power, freedom, and life, that is "turf." In the Old Testament the resurrection motif is undoubtedly expressed as the call to exiles to leave exile and return to the land.

Thus crucifixion/resurrection echoes the dialectic of possessed land lost/exiles en route to the land of promise.(7)

In the crucifixion, Christ embraces landlessness, and in the resurrection, restoration to the land. Christ himself becomes the embodiment of new land and, in him, the promise of land continues. Hence, Brueggemann regards the New Testament proclamation of a new kingdom as a promise about turf--and in terms of the same dialectic.(8) Grasping is the way to lose the land, trusting is the way to receive it:

Jesus embodies precisely what Israel has learned about land: being without land makes it possible to trust the promise of it, while grasping land is the sure way to lose it. The powerful are called to dispossession. The powerless are called to power. The landed are called to homelessness. The landless are given a new home.(9)

In this passage, Brueggemann comes perilously close to defeating his own argument. For, as previously determined, "home" does not simply denote turf, but necessarily includes the symbolic connotations of land as

place--one's home with God and fellow human beings. With this thought in mind, we can regard the "spiritual" home of the three survivors in No Strangers in Exile as God's gift. One can also perceive Thom Wiens' new regard for the land and his new understanding of Wapiti as home, as well as John Reimer's walking "to feel the land" as examples of trusters who have been restored to the land. In each of these cases, spiritual at-homeness with God comes through relinquishing past identification with land ownership and experiencing a spiritual enlightenment that alters their perspective of the land. Wilderness wasteland becomes a home because it is where the nearness of God is known. In this way, the landless are given a new home. Therefore, if we allow ourselves to think of land in terms of home or place, then the stories of both Israelites and Mennnites--our authors and Brueggemann--demonstrate the same conclusions about land. Those who grasp the land shall lose it, and those who trust in the promise shall receive it: ". . . grasping for home leads to homelessness and risking homelessness yields the gift of home."(10)

Although perceiving land in the rather symbolic terminology of "home" seems to resolve the disparity of interpretation regarding faith and the land, it does not fully address the issue. For Brueggemann maintains that the promise of land/of gift entails a historical, political transformation that includes the occupation of actual turf:

There is no doubt that the center of the New Testament proclamation is the end of one age, one kingdom, one political-historical arrangement and the announcement of a new age, a new kingdom, a new political-historical arrangement. . . . The theme of "kingdom" is crucial for our consideration. It clearly includes among its nuances the idea of historical, political, physical realm, that is, land. It may and surely does mean more than that, but it is never so spiritualized that those elemental nuances are denied or overcome. (11)

And herein we seem to arrive once again at a stalemate of disagreement regarding the emphasis of interpretation about promise and gift. The Mennonite authors we have studied depict land as an inhibitor of Christian faith and emphasize gift as foremostly a spiritual place, while Brueggemann maintains that the word about gift involves a geographical/physical place.

These perspectives, however, are not irreconcilable. If we return once again to the dialectic of gift and grasp, we can observe in the very nature of the dialectic, the resolution to this seeming disparity. The resolution lies in consideration of audience and history.

The authors we have studied speak from a Mennonite background, about the Mennonites of history. As we have seen, some of the Mennonites in these works live as graspers of the land; and generally, all of the Mennonites are characterized as having eyes focused on the land. The exceptions to this observation are those characters who represent the authors' models of true religious life. In every case, these characters are not concerned with land. Moreover, those individuals who

experience a religious transformation, experience inner change. In these ways, the authors emphasize the spiritual aspect of gift. This perspective is fitting because these authors write of a people who have lived as graspers of the land. The authors approach the dialectic of gift/grasp from the side of landedness, land ownership, and grasping, and call people to an awareness of the inner aspect of religious life.

On the other hand, Brueggemann in his book The Land addresses modern urban society and its problems of homelessness, landlessness, and alienation. In response to these problems, he naturally downplays the spiritual nature of gift and emphasizes the promise of gift as including turf.(12) Brueggemann is particularly critical of a "spiritualized" interpretation of New Testament faith. Using the existentialist hermeneutic of Bultmann as his example, Brueggemann claims that its emphasis on "emancipation" and "meaning" locates the center of faith and the promises of faith in the private world of the individual and removes the New Testament from "history in land or history toward land":

It is clear that the land emphasis, which concerns transmission of the inheritance from generation to generation, places the faithful believer in the flow of generations. A focus on "now" decisions of faith is untenable because land must be cared for in sustained ways. It is equally the case that the land possessed or the land promised is by definition a communal concern. It will not do to make the individual person the unit of decision-making because in both Testaments the land possessed or promised concerns the whole people.(13)

For Brueggemann, the result of the

spiritualization/privatization of Christian faith is a religious perspective that is too individual, that contains no abiding continuities, and that allows materialism, land abuse, and social inequities to escalate uncontrolled.(14) Conversely, he stresses the importance of rootage and belonging in religious life:

The central problem is not emancipation but rootage, not meaning but belonging, not separation from community but location within it, not isolation from others but placement deliberately between the generation of promise and fulfillment. The Bible is addressed to the central human problem of homelessness (anomie) and seeks to respond to that agenda in terms of gift and grasp.(15)

It is clear from the above passages that the central issue Brueggemann addresses is opposite to that of the Mennonite authors. Therefore, it is logical that he approaches the dialectic of gift and grasp from its opposite end.

In conclusion, in consideration of audience and history--context, if you will--it is evident that both the Mennonite authors and Brueggemann stress the aspect of the relation of New Testament Christian faith and the land that is most relevant to the historical situation they address. Brueggemann himself seems quite aware of this kind of motivation for his own thinking. He writes: "The author is aware that the current effort is not unlike Bultmann's; interest in land may well be the result of the rootlessness of our situation."(16) Regarding the two perspectives from this point of view, they appear, not as two disparate ways of thinking, but as, themselves,

dialectical poles on the issue of the relation of land and faith. Taken together, they form a wholistic perspective which represents a significant message about Christian faith and the land.

In both the Mennonite literature and Brueggemann's The Land, we observed how self-securing of land ends in land-loss, and trusting in promise is the way to receive gift. Both perspectives call graspers to recognize and be open to gift. The Mennonite authors emphasize the emancipation of faith from bondage to the land, while Brueggemann stresses the importance of rootage, community, and belonging in the land for faith and religious life. Posed as dialectical extremes, the message they form is that humans must not allow faith to become imprisoned by preoccupation with the land, and neither should we allow faith to become spiritualized to the extent that the land is desacralized and human beings left alienated and confused. What is also significant is that the message as a whole affirms that faith is, and continues to be, shaped by relation to the land. And herein lies a possible further contribution to modern Mennonites' endeavor to redefine their faith identity.

V.

As mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, there is a general trend among Canadian Mennonites to re-evaluate the fundamental expressions of their faith in response to their increased participation in modern urban

society.(17) In developing a new schema, scholars, clergy, and lay people are returning to the Mennonites' origins and are revitalizing their Anabaptist religious heritage. It is an appropriate trend for one thing, because the Anabaptists lived a relation to the land that is now echoed by many contemporary Mennonites. The Anabaptists were generally a landless, wandering people as are many Mennonites today. For this reason, the Anabaptists' perception of themselves and the world is relevant to the landless Mennonites of modernity.

The Mennonite works we have studied also contribute to the revitalization of Anabaptist faith. However, in the Mennonite writings we have studied, the Anabaptist way of faith and life represents not only the archetype of Mennonite faith but the paragon as well. What this fact suggests is that the trend to resurrect Anabaptist faith as a model for modern Mennonite faith is more than merely a matter of relevance. All of the authors portray the colony lifestyle, with its religious and cultural ties to the land, in a pejorative manner. Accordingly, each of their portrayals of true religious life advocates a faith based on Anabaptist principles. The fact that both Hans Harder and Dietrich Neufeld wrote long before the "modern" problem became a reality in Mennonite life, reinforces the idea that the significance of the Anabaptist model for Mennonite religious life is more than merely a trend of relevance. Rather, the fact indicates that perhaps the truth of Mennonite Christian

faith and discipleship lies in this heritage.

As Mennonite people become increasingly emancipated from the land and increasingly involved in modern urban lifestyles, they are being confronted by new issues and problems. More specifically, they are precisely the issues addressed by Brueggemann in The Land. Peter Berger's analysis of modern society substantiates Brueggemann's descriptions of it as a place that fosters feelings of homelessness and loss of identity. Both scholars affirm that the pluralistic nature of urban life promotes the privatization of religion and the secularization of life in general. Writes Berger:

Religion can be defined as a cognitive and normative structure that makes it possible for man to feel "at home" in the universe. . . . however . . . the secularizing effect of pluralization has gone hand in hand with other secularizing forces in modern society. The final consequence of all this can be put very simply . . . : modern man has suffered from a deepening condition of "homelessness."(18)

The problem of homelessness is compounded for those who enter modern society from what Berger calls "traditional" society. He describes traditional society as a community that is ideologically homogeneous, where individuals know a common identity, history, and faith with their neighbors.(19) The loss of these support structures results in increased feelings of alienation when the transition to modern society is made. Using the example of Third World societies, Berger describes the nature of this experience:

Modernity is in fact experienced as liberation--from the narrow confines of tradition, of

poverty, of the bonds of clan and tribe. On the other hand, a very high price is exacted for this liberation. The individual comes to experience himself as being alone in a way that is unthinkable in traditional society--deprived of the firm solidarity of his collectivity, uncertain of the norms by which his life is to be governed, finally uncertain of who or what he is. . . . Liberation and alienation are inextricably connected, reverse sides of the same coin of modernity."(20)

Berger's observations in the above passage apply to the Mennonites as well. Their colony and village existence parallels Berger's description of traditional society. Our study of Mennonite writing also reflects the identical situation. The alienation experienced as a result of the transition from traditional to modern society that Berger describes is the same problem confronted by Mennonites making the transition from rural to urban existence--from landedness to landlessness. As Mennonite people become ever more liberated from the agrarian, isolated community existence of the past, they necessarily confront problems of feelings of displacement, homelessness, and loss of self-identity.(21)

It is to these problems of modernity now confronting urban Mennonites that Brueggemann's conclusions about the land are relevant. The Anabaptists had no developed theology of the land. So, to the Mennonites returning to the existentialist-type, pilgrim-type self-perception of their earliest forefathers, Brueggemann's viewpoint stands as a reminder of the importance of storied place, of land, for Christian faith. Christianity should not become so spiritualized

that the land is desacralized.

The fact that the works we have studied even exist is an indication of the importance of storied place for religious self-identity. All of these works remember the lands of the Mennonite past. And although the central religious message calls for emancipation from preoccupation with the land, these writings, nevertheless, recall for the reader a sense of the importance of the lands of the past for deriving a meaningful sense of identity in the present.

Now, it is not within the scope or intention of this study to develop a New Testament theology of the land, or to pass judgement on the merits of New Testament interpretations of Christian faith. However, it is nonetheless worthy to conclude that both Walter Brueggemann's and the Mennonite authors' interpretations of New Testament faith in relation to the land are significant. If either one is taken to excess, the thinking ends in difficulty. But, if seen as opposite poles of a dialectic on land and faith, they provide an important balance to each other.

One might, of course, avoid the issue of New Testament perspectives of land by selecting another paradigm for interpreting the Mennonite literature. For example, rather than regarding the story of the Mennonites as a series of histories based on the people's status in relation to the land, one might regard the collective

story presented in these novels as one singular, progressive history. From this viewpoint, the Mennonite story would, perhaps, appear as the ongoing pilgrimage of a people with various interludes of rest. The land, then, would become a far more incidental factor in interpreting the nature of religious experience as presented in the literature. I think, however, that this approach disregards what the authors clearly present as significant; i.e., the important role of land in Mennonite religious life--in all religious life. These authors, like Brueggemann, affirm that faith is, indeed, always held, shaped, and formed by relation to the land.

NOTES

1. John L. Ruth, Mennonite Identity and Literary Art, Focal Pamphlet 29 (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1978), p. 18.

2. Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, and Other Mennonite Essays (Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1979), p. 119.

3. The early Anabaptists regarded the New Testament as authoritative over the Old Testament and used the New Testament writings as their literal guide for righteous living. See The Mennonite Encyclopedia 1955, s.v. "Bible;" 1959, s.v. "Old Testament," s.v. "Theology, Anabaptist-Mennonite."

4. See Menno Simons, "The Cross of the Saints," in The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, John C. Wenger ed. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956), pp.579-622 and Tielmann van Braght, Martyrs Mirror (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1951).

5. Brueggemann is aware of his rather unorthodox interpretation of the New Testament in regard to the land. He writes: "I am aware that my conclusions on the relation of the Old and New Testaments are innovative. On the one hand, they do not fit our usual categories of New Testament interpretation which are often in terms of narrowly Christological doctrinal theories of atonement rather than in terms of the field of images in which the New Testament lived. I hope there is a legitimate suggestion here of fresh ways in which the intent of the text might be discerned." See Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. xvii.

6. Brueggemann, Land, p. 180.

7. Ibid., pp. 167-183. Brueggemann suggests that the Gospels, the Johanne and Pauline epistles contain passages that could be interpreted to be concerned about turf.

8. Brueggemann, Land, p. 180.

9. Ibid., p. 189.

10. Ibid., pp. 170, 171.

11. Brueggemann acknowledges the unorthodoxy of this interpretation, especially in comparison to Davies, who maintains that the theme of land is displaced by the

person of Jesus Christ. See Brueggemann, Land, p. 170 and W. D. Davies, The Gospel and the Land (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 336-337.

12. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 1-3.

13. Ibid., pp. 185-187, 186.

14. Ibid., pp. 184-186, 191-196.

15. Ibid., p. 187.

16. Ibid.

17. It must be acknowledged that it is not exclusively Canadian Mennonites who are involved in this process. Wherever Mennonites are living in large urban centers this process is evident. I use the term Canadian to maintain continuity with the study as a whole.

18. Peter Berger, The Homeless Mind (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 79, 82.

19. Peter Berger, The Heretical Imperative (New York: Anchor Press, 1979), pp. 11-22.

20. Berger, Heretical, p. 23.

21. Waldemar Janzen observes this among Mennonites in Still in the Image (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982), p. 144.

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