CHANGING ATTITUDES:

RELATIONS OF MENNONITE MISSIONARIES WITH NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS

1880 TO 2004

BY

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Abstract

This study compares and contrasts changes in attitudes and methods of the General Conference Mennonite mission in the United States and the Bergthaler Mennonite Pioneer Mission in Manitoba toward Native North Americans. The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America was closely connected historically with the Manitoba Bergthaler Church. In fact, the Bergthaler Church joined the General Conference in 1968. The General Conference mission to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi in the United States began in 1880 while the Manitoba Mennonite Pioneer Mission to the Ojibwa, Cree, and people of mixed ancestry in Manitoba began in 1948. Research of case studies for both missions shows that the Mennonite Pioneer Mission began with the same methods and attitudes as the much earlier Mennonite mission in the south. Changes that took place were not dependent on how long the respective missions had been in operation. Changing attitudes happened simultaneously in the United States and in the Manitoba mission, as a reflection of changing attitudes in society. In the 1960s and 1970s, both missions became more accepting of other cultures as missionaries began to dialogue with people of different backgrounds and life ways. They realized that instead of being bearers of absolute truth, they could listen and learn as well. After 1980 and continuing to 2004, interest in missions seemed to wane in the Mennonite constituency. Consequently funding for missions to Native peoples was greatly reduced. This study raises some interesting questions about the dilemmas of syncretism, denominationalism, and what happened to Mennonite distinctives such as adult baptism on confession of faith, the

peace position, and separateness from society as Mennonites and Native North Americans interacted and faced new challenges of communication and mutual adaptation.

Changing Attitudes: Relations of Mennonite Missionaries with Native North Americans 1880 to 2004

Preface

In the past decades, change among Native peoples of North America has been a popular subject for scholars.[1] They have emphasized that Native North Americans' cultures were not static; they were dynamic, continuously influenced by other tribes and cultures around them. Many of these scholars have described the changes brought about by missionaries and governments in negative terms. What is often forgotten, however, is that while missionaries were working to bring about changes among Native peoples, their own larger worlds were changing, thus affecting their methods and attitudes.

This study examines change among Mennonite missionaries, and their sending agencies, to Native North Americans between 1880 and 2004. It explores and compares the attitudes and methods of the first Mennonite missionaries to aboriginal peoples in the United States, specifically Oklahoma, Arizona, and Montana (1880-1900) with those in Canada, specifically northern Manitoba (1948-1970), through detailing case histories of missionaries. Then it evaluates American and Manitoba Mennonite missions fifty years after their beginnings. Finally, it describes developments up to 2004 in the United States and in Manitoba and how attitudes and methods have changed since the beginning of Mennonite missionary efforts.

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See for example Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada 1780 to 1870* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1994). See also Olive Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994). For the United States see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Context of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

My assumption before beginning this research was that the history of an organization reflects its precedents more than its context, and that Mennonite Pioneer Mission, beginning almost seventy years later, would have built upon experiences and lessons learned from the earlier General Conference missions. My assumption was that since American Mennonites made some progressive changes in their churches earlier than did Canadian Mennonites, their missions to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi would also have become more progressive. However, my research indicated that American Mennonites remained conservative in the way they conducted missions until the 1960s, perhaps because they were influenced by the fundamentalist/modernist debate. At the same time, the Mennonite Pioneer Mission, begun by the Manitoba Bergthaler, began conservatively but became more progressive during the first decades of its existence. Changes in both American and Manitoba mission agencies evolved simultaneously, reflecting wider societal thought.

Ed. G. Kaufman, a Mennonite historian, states that "The [General] Conference began with unity of all Mennonites in America as one of its goals..."[2] The General Conference, with its offices located in the United States, was divided into six district conferences, one of them being Canada, and related to each district in an advisory capacity.[3] The district mission boards were directly responsible to the General Conference. Yet the General Conference and

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Ed. G. Kaufman, "General Conference Mennonite Church," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. II, 470.

3

The Bergthaler churches, who began Mennonite Pioneer Mission, did not join the General Conference until 1968. However, research shows that the General Conference mission board was very much involved in the organization of Mennonite Pioneer Mission. The origins of and close relationships between the General Conference and the Bergthaler Mennonites will be described in chapters two and four. See Henry Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1970), 333-335. See also Kaufman, 467.

Mennonite Pioneer Mission were separate entities, since the Manitoba Bergthaler did not join the General Conference until 1968.[4]

Several disclaimers are necessary. This study is limited to General Conference Mennonite missions to aboriginals in the United States and to the Mennonite Pioneer Mission (MPM), later Native Ministries (NM), begun by Bergthaler Mennonites in Manitoba.[5] Even within these parameters, the case studies that follow in no way cover every General Conference and MPM/NM missionary in every place. Furthermore, this study does not deal with justice and land issues or residential school abuses, the areas addressed by Mennonite Central Committee of Canada.

C.L.Higham finds that although the governments of the United States and Canada had some fundamental differences in their attitudes toward and treatment of Native peoples, the attitudes of mainline Protestant missionaries in the United States and Canada were similar. Missionaries from both countries thought of aboriginals first as "noble savages" and later as "wretched Indians," but Protestant missionaries, both in the United States and in Canada, considered them to be "redeemable."[6] The image missionaries had of their potential converts affected how they conducted missions. Protestant publications promoted this image in

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See Anna Ens, *In Search of Unity: Story of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1996), Table 8, 160-162.

5

This dissertation does not deal with missions established by Mennonite Brethren, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, *Kleine Gemeinde*, Church of God in Christ Mennonite, *Bruderthaler*, or Swiss-South German Mennonites who did not join the General Conference.

6

C.L. Higham, *Noble, Wretched, & Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (University of Calgary Press, 2000), 3-5, 50-56. Higham draws her information from church records.

newsletters to their constituencies. Do Higham's findings about mainline Protestants apply to North American Mennonite missions as well? Did twentieth century Mennonite missionaries continue to think about aboriginal peoples as "wretched Indians" or had their concepts changed since the nineteenth century? How have Mennonite missions been conducted in the twentieth century? Have Mennonite missionaries accepted their converts as equals?

Were there similarities between Mennonite missions and mainline Protestant missions?[7] Higham claims that in the early years, mainline Protestant missionary societies expected quick conversion, tithing converts, and self-supporting missions in short order, but their missionaries found that these were unrealistic expectations among aboriginal peoples. Did Native peoples respond more quickly to Mennonite missions? Did Mennonite mission stations become self-supporting and independent in less time than mainline mission stations or did they face the same problems?

Mennonite missions to aboriginal peoples in the United States began in 1880, when the General Conference Mennonites sent their first missionary, Samuel Haury, to the Cheyenne and Arapaho in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. In Manitoba, the Bergthaler Mennonites began missions to aboriginal peoples relatively late. The first missions committee was appointed in 1940. Mennonite Pioneer Mission, which became Native Ministries in 1975, officially began in 1944 to the Tarahumara in Mexico and in 1948 to the people of mixed

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Mennonites are Protestants since they originated from the group that left the Catholic Church with the Reformation, but they are not considered mainline Protestants. Walter Klaassen, Anabaptist historian, calls his book *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Grebel Press, 1973).

ancestry and the Ojibwa and Cree in northern Manitoba.[8] Sending organizations and churches were changing during the years when MPM/NM sent missionaries to northern Manitoba Transitions such as language from German to English, lay ministry to educated professional pastors, and traditionalism to revivalism were taking place In the area of missions, Manitoba Mennonites changed from being objects of mission to becoming sending agencies to other peoples.[9] Did their methods and attitudes about Native peoples change as well?

Did Manitoba Mennonites learn anything from American Mennonite missions which began over sixty years earlier? Did both missions change from their beginnings to 2004? When did these changes occur–did change come earlier with the American than with the Manitoba mission, since missions to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi began earlier than missions to the Cree, Ojibwa, and people of mixed ancestry in Manitoba? Did the missionaries themselves change during their stays among Native peoples? Were Manitoba churches, boards, and missionaries more open to indigenization and syncretism than their southern counterparts when they began their mission? Were United States and Manitoba Mennonites more open to these concepts at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century? Could Mennonites accept an alternative to either outright aboriginal rejection of Christianity or to their intended total replacement of traditional religions?

8

Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 332-335. In 1956, MPM also began a mission with the Cree at Cross Lake.

9

Anna Ens, *In Search of Unity: Story of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1996), 109-124. The first Manitoba Mennonites were the object of missions when Mennonite Brethren and General Conference missionaries came in from the south.

Lois Barrett, in her history of General Conference Home Missions, writes that the goals of the first missionaries were to civilize and Christianize, with the intention of also imposing their clothing, furniture, and farming on Native peoples.[10] In this way then, the General Conference Mennonite mission was like other Protestant missions. Did these expectations change in later years? If there were changes, did they come about as a result of interaction with the Hopi, Cheyenne, and Arapaho?

Like other Protestant missionaries, Mennonite missionaries had authority and power at their mission stations. Did they allow for indigenous expressions of worship? Could they let go of control as they trained Native Christians to become leaders of their own churches? Could they allow Native churches to become self-governing? What were the differences or similarities between American and Manitoba Mennonite missionaries in this respect?

Historically, Mennonites had been a closed ethnic community. When they sent missionaries to peoples of other ethnic backgrounds, their goal was to win new converts that would be added to the Mennonite church. But converts of non-Mennonite backgrounds would change the character of the Mennonite church from an exclusive, ethnic church to an inclusive church that could accept peoples of other traditions. Including peoples of other backgrounds would raise the question: "Who is a Mennonite?" MPM originated when Mennonite conscientious objectors served their terms on reserves in southern Manitoba and became aware

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10

Lois Barrett, *The Vision and the Reality: The Story of Home Missions in the General Conference Mennonite Church* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1983), 15. Although Barrett wrote a history of General Conference Mennonite Home Missions, she included what was called "foreign mission" in 1880. Barrett calls this section "The Foreign Mission at Home." As in the literature of other Protestants of that time, missions to North American Natives was called "Foreign Missions" while missions to other peoples in North America were called "Home Missions."

of Canada's Cree and Ojibwa. Yet, when MPM sent its first missionaries, they chose fields that were relatively inaccessible.[11] Was this done intentionally or sub-consciously so that the Cree and Ojibwa could not join southern Manitoba churches? Did the choice of mission fields reflect a concern that local churches should remain ethnically "pure?"

If Mennonites wanted to remain ethnically "pure," they also wanted to present a "pure" gospel according to their own understanding of biblical truth to aboriginal peoples. Did changes occur in this area? Were late twentieth century missionaries and their board and constituency flexible enough to allow for other understandings that incorporated what others religions saw as truth? Could they build upon commonalities between Christianity and traditional religions? Christianity has been seen as an exclusive religion; most nineteenth century Protestant and Catholic missionaries and their churches believed that Christianity should completely replace aboriginal spiritual values, practices, and cultures. Could twentieth century Mennonites accept a response that was not simply rejection or acceptance? Could they accept syncretism?

The ethnohistorical approach should ask the same questions of both parties. Both Native and Mennonite voices need to be heard. How do the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Hopi, Cree and Ojibwa reflect upon Mennonite missionaries who came to their reserves? From Native points of view, have Mennonite missionaries built upon commonalities? Has it been possible for converts to be Christian and retain a Native identity? Have General Conference and MPM/NM missionaries taught everything and learned nothing or has dialogical interaction

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11

For example Jake Unrau, MPM's first missionary, served as a conscientious objector in Riding Mountain National Park in 1941. Yet neither he nor the MPM Board considered a mission to the adjacent Keeseekowenin Reserve. See Jake Unrau, *Living in the Way: The Pilgrimage of Jake & Trudie Unrau* (Winnipeg, CMBC Publications, 1996), 19-21.

become normal? The Native perspectives are usually much more difficult to ascertain than the missionary perspectives. At the conclusion of my research, I am not sure that I have been able to answer these questions from a Native perspective. Why should the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Hopi, Ojibwa, or Cree tell me, a stranger, how they feel about General Conference or MPM/NM presence among them? I have tried to listen for Native voices in the literature and in the archival records, and I have attended various functions where I could interact with Native Christians who have been in contact with Mennonite missionaries.

The following chapters examine the attitudes of Mennonite missionaries to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi beginning in 1880, and then the attitudes of Mennonite missionaries to the Ojibwa and Cree in Manitoba beginning in 1948. Evidence suggests that General Conference Mennonite missionaries began with many of the same ethnocentric premises both in the United States in 1880 and in Manitoba in 1948. Both organizations experienced turning points in methods and attitudes during the 1960s and 1970s. In the last half of the twentieth century major changes took place among the Mennonites, in the beliefs and approaches of the missionaries and their Boards in both the United States and Manitoba. Unfortunately, people in Mennonite communities who had less contact with Native Christians often lagged behind in cross-cultural understanding. After the 1980s, constituency interest dropped away, resulting in major budgetary and program cuts.

Information for this dissertation is drawn from primary and secondary sources, including secondary sources by academic historians of Protestant missions to Native peoples, which I will briefly outline in the following historiographical chapter. These works provide a context for understanding Mennonite activities, goals, methods, and attitudes.

Acknowledgements

My fascination with missions to aboriginal peoples began in 1995 when I took Jennifer S.H. Brown's course, Special Topics in Social History, which highlighted aboriginal history, and problems that developed in relationships between missionaries and Native peoples. My Master's thesis focused on George Flett, a Presbyterian missionary of mixed ancestry, who served the Ojibwa of the Keeseekoowenin Reserve from 1875 to 1895. During my subsequent studies, my attention turned to the activities of Mennonite missionaries and to the abundant records that are housed at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, some in the German language. The United Church Conference Archives in Winnipeg holds documents that describe Mennonite activities on Native reserves, especially during World War II and the following years, when Mennonite young men worked as conscientious objectors for the United Church. These records stimulated my interest.

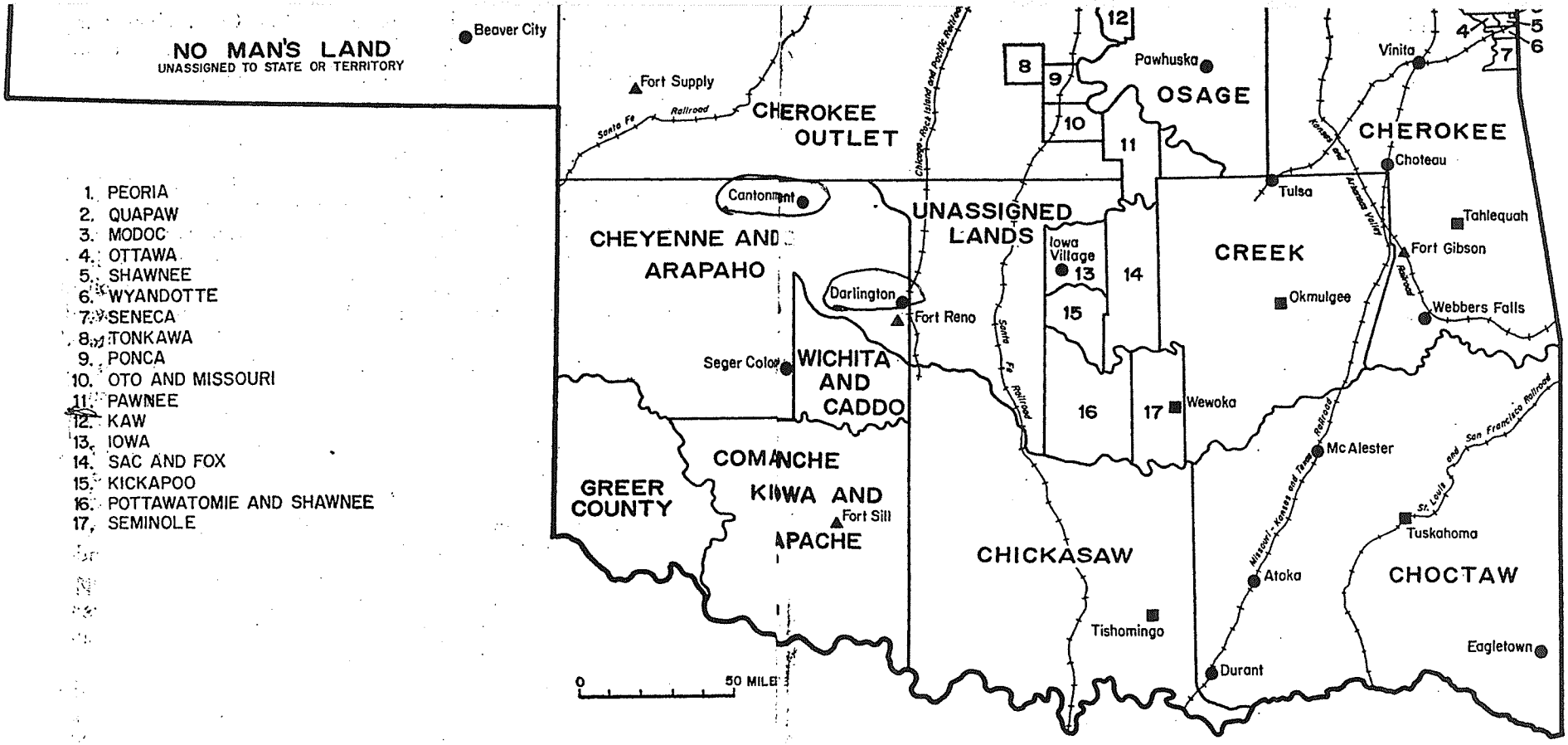
One of the three fields for my comprehensives was Mennonite history. In my readings, I was captivated by the methods and attitudes of the first three Mennonite couples who went to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi in Oklahoma and Arizona in 1880. I wondered if these methods and attitudes had changed by 1948, when the Mennonites in Manitoba sent their first missionary couple to the peoples of mixed ancestry and the Ojibwa in the vicinity of Matheson Island. My curiosity led me to do a comparison of Mennonite missionaries to Native peoples in the United States with the MPM mission which began in Manitoba in 1948.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Jennifer S.H. Brown, for her encouragement, good editorial suggestions, and prompt communications. Without her, I could not have completed this dissertation. Thanks also to Professors T.D. Regehr , Klaus Klaustermaier, Jarvis Brownlie, and Royden Loewen for their willingness to be in the defense

committee.. Thank you to Carol Adam, Sandra Ferguson and Lisa McKendry who saw me through the mechanical processes of printing out the finished product. Thanks to the staff at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg who made their records available to me and offered advice on numerous occasions. Thanks also to Dianne Haglund, United Church Conference archivist, for allowing me to study the records of Mennonite conscientious objectors who served the United Church on Indian reserves in the 1940s. Thank you to all those wonderful people, Native and non-Native, who patiently answered my questions when I interviewed them. Thanks especially to Henry and Elna Neufeld for their encouragement. I also thank Ike Froese and the late Malcolm Wenger for providing me with copies of their valuable files.

I am grateful to the University of Manitoba for Manitoba Graduate Fellowships, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a three-year grant, and the University of Winnipeg's German Department for a German-Canadian Studies Research Scholarship.

Above all I thank my late husband, Isaac Block, for his faith in me and his encouragement as I pursued my studies. I finish this Ph.D. dissertation because of his wish that I would do so.



Indian Territory, 1866–1889.

Berthrong, Donald. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal: Reservation and Agency Life in the Indian Territory, 1875-1907 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 15.

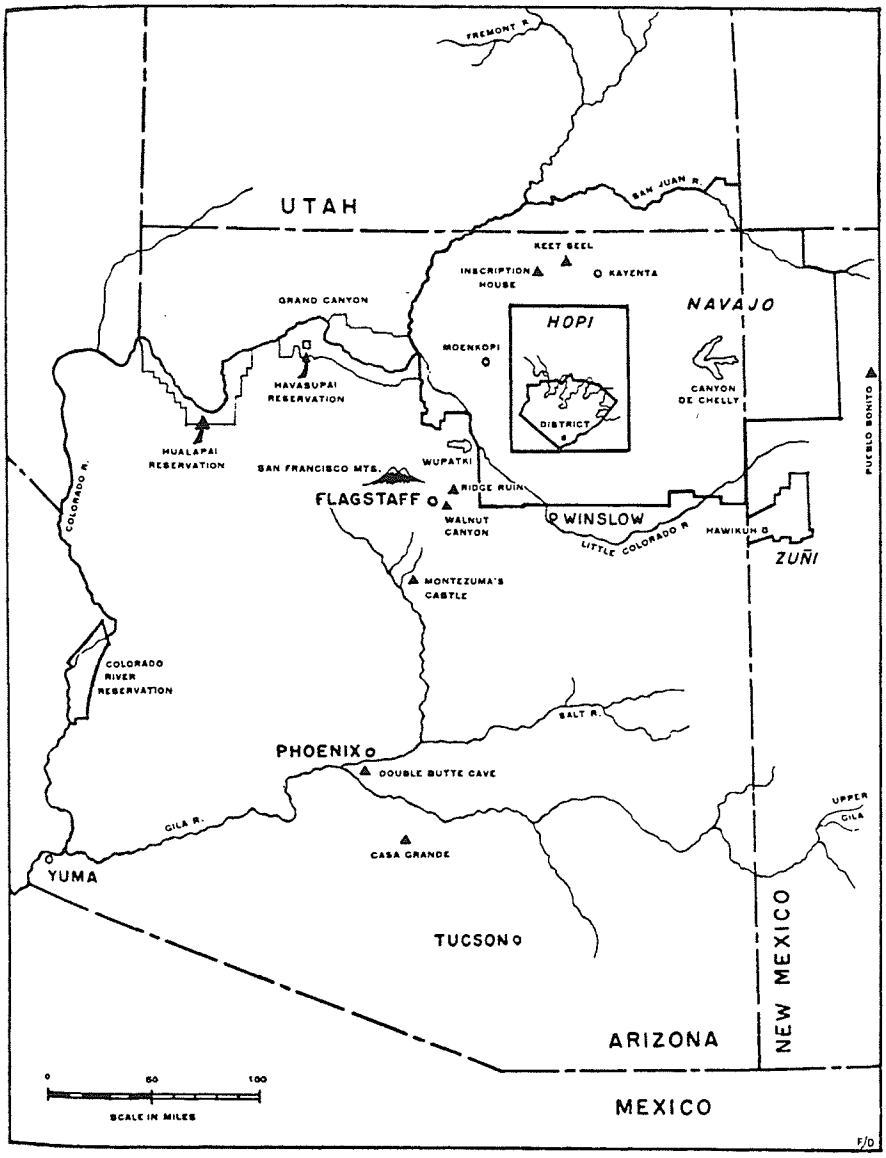
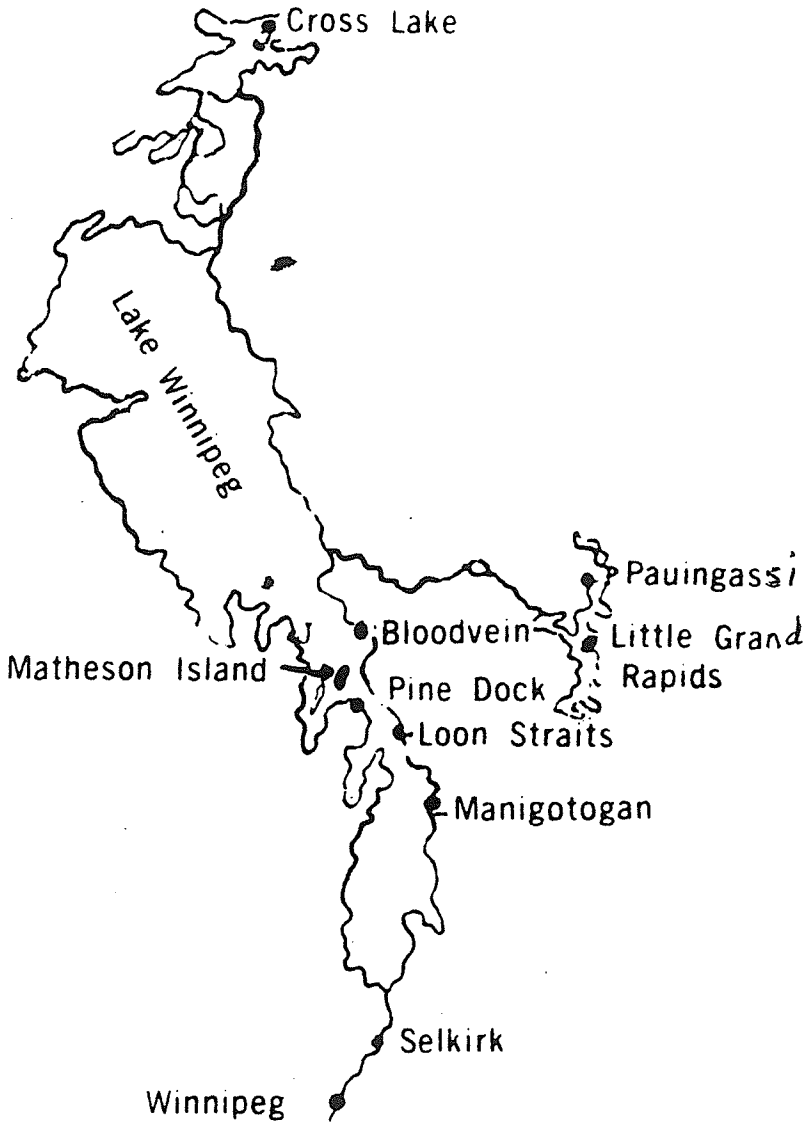


Figure 1. The Hopi Reservation and neighboring areas.

Dockstader, Frederick J. *The Kachina and the White Man: the Influence of White Culture on the Hopi Kachina Cult* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 3.

Manitoba



BULLETIN (30 MAY 1975), 18

Chapter One

Historiography

Numerous scholars have explored the problem of cultural contact between Native North Americans and mainline Protestant and Catholic missionaries. Yet they have not thoroughly explored the attitudes of General Conference Mennonite missionaries towards the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi in the United States, or Mennonite Pioneer Mission(MPM)/Native Ministries (NM)[12] towards peoples of mixed ancestry, Ojibwa, and Cree in Manitoba. This chapter lists and briefly describes Mennonite sources in the United States and Canada, hagiographies written by Mennonite missionaries, academic literature on Protestant missions to aboriginals, sources by Native North Americans, and oral interviews.

Most primary sources on this subject are found in Mennonite archives, not in government or provincial archives. The main source of information is the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg where MPM/NM collections are kept. Mennonite periodicals, conference reports, and missionary newsletters at the Heritage Centre are rich sources for information about General Conference missions in the United States. For Manitoba, the Treaty & Aboriginal Rights Research Centre in Winnipeg has background histories of the reserves where Mennonite missions were established. The United Church of Canada: Archives of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario holds records of United Church reactions to Mennonite conscientious objectors who taught at reservations during the Second World War.

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[12]Mennonite Pioneer Mission was renamed Native Ministries in 1975.

Mennonite Sources: United States

Several sources describe General Conference Mennonite thought during the years when they began missions to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi. The *Christlicher Bundesbote* was the official denominational paper for General Conference Mennonites. The readership was made up of Mennonites who were interested in missions, both Swiss Mennonites[13] living in eastern United States and also recent immigrants from Russia who lived in the central states.[14] This bimonthly periodical (later weekly), published in the German language in Berne, Indiana, was begun in 1882 under the editorship of David Goerz. The *Bundesbote* is a rich source of German language letters and reports written by Mennonite missionaries who worked with the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi from 1880 onward. Although these letters were written to enlist the support of a public audience and need to be understood as such, they contain much valuable information about the first Mennonite missions to America's Native peoples.

The Mennonite, a monthly paper in the English language, was begun in 1885. It was originally published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by the Eastern Mennonite Conference. In 1902, it was turned over to the General Conference and published in Berne, Indiana. It was to be "devoted to the interest of the Mennonite Church, and the cause of Christ at large."[15] Quarterly reports of Mennonite missionaries to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi were

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13

Mennonites from Switzerland and southern Germany settled in the eastern United States beginning in 1682.

14

In 1950, after it merged with the Canadian *Bote*, circulation was 4,500. It was likely smaller in the 1880s. See Cornelius Krahn, "Christlicher Bundesbote," in *The Mennonite Encylopedia* Vol. I, 584-585.

[15]*The Mennonite*: (December 1886): 40.

published in this periodical. The Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg holds early issues of both the *Christlicher Bundesbote* and *The Mennonite*.

Several early Mennonite histories describe the formation of the General Conference, the organization which sent the first missionaries to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi. H.P. Krehbiel, son of Christian Krehbiel who was the president of the Mission Board for many years and founder of the Halstead Industrial School, authored two volumes, published in 1898 and 1938. The first volume covers General Conference Mennonite history from 1860 to 1896, while the second volume covers 1896 to 1935. A.B. Shelly, who was the secretary of the General Conference from 1872 to 1896 and secretary of the Foreign Mission Board after 1890, wrote in the introduction:

> ...it is an evident fact, that the Mennonite Church has made more real progress, and has furnished more material for denominational church history, during the last fifty years, than during the preceding three centuries.[16]

The above quotation shows that the spirit of progress, prevalent in North America at the time, was beginning to infiltrate Mennonite communities. Progress meant change; therefore it was deemed important to record past Mennonite traditions for future generations before they were forgotten. Krehbiel wrote his two volumes of Mennonite history close to the events of his time, without interpretation or analysis.

Four decades later, Samuel Floyd Pannabecker, at different times an educator, missionary to China, mission board member, and president of the General Conference Mennonite Biblical Seminary at Elkhart, Indiana, published a new history of the General

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A.B. Shelly, introduction in *The History of the General Conference of the Mennonites of North America*, Vol. I, by H.P. Krehbiel (St. Louis, MO: A. Wiebusch & Son Prtg. Co., 1898), xii.

Conference Mennonites, based on his Yale doctoral dissertation. Erland Waltner, president of the seminary in 1944, compared Pannabecker's book to Krehbiel's volumes:

> ...early precursors [Krehbeil's histories], valuable for what they are, do not give the contemporary reader either the comprehensiveness or the depth of interpretation that this new volume [Pannabecker's history], with the advantage of more research and a longer perspective, is able to offer.[17]

Pannabecker's theme was that with the open doors in a new country, North America, came new opportunities for change. Old forms and activities in the Mennonite church had to give way to new possibilities which included publication, education, and missions. Because of the need for these innovations, the General Conference Mennonite Church was organized. For Pannabecker, 1775 to 1850 was the Mennonite Dark Age in North America, while 1850 to 1925 was the age of renewal, when the church was awakened to the need to come out of its isolation and to reach out into other communities.[18]

Mennonite history was reinterpreted in the 1980s and 1990s by the authors of the four volumes of *Mennonite Experience in America* series. Unlike Krehbiel and Pannabecker, whose main concern was the history of the General Conference, these four authors wrote a comprehensive history of all North American Mennonites, including the Old Mennonites, the Amish, the Mennonite Brethren, and other Mennonite groups. Richard McMaster, author of the first volume, presents the years from 1683 to 1790, Theron Schlabach the years from 1790 to 1890, James Juhnke from 1890 to 1930, and Paul Toews from 1930 to 1970. Each of these authors clearly shows the different streams of thought among Mennonites. Conservatives

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[17] Erland Waltner, introduction to *Open Doors: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church*, by Samuel Floyd Pannabecker (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1975), vii. See also Erland Waltner, "Pannabecker, Samuel Floyd," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, 671-672.

[18] Pannabecker, 14.

refused to accept new ways, and change in these traditional groups came very slowly. However, some groups, such as the General Conference Mennonites, adapted to American society as well as to Protestant models, and with adaptation came changes. Through contact with American society, Mennonite thought was influenced by Darwinism, industrialism, urbanization, modernism, science, progress, and new opportunities for security and wealth.

Of the four *Mennonite Experience in America* volumes, only Juhnke's book provides direct information about the General Conference missions among the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi. Yet all of these authors give important background information necessary to the understanding of why Mennonites, who were a separatist people, became mission minded. The authors of the series show that Mennonites were not as isolated from society as many believed. In response to societal pressures, some Mennonites were drawn into the Protestant fundamentalist/modernist debate. Like other Protestant denominations, some branches of Mennonites established organizations and institutions. Other factors that shaped progressive groups of Mennonites were American pietism and revivalism which had come to the United States through the Great Awakenings of 1720 to1740 and 1800 to 1830. World Wars I and II brought Mennonites in contact with a wider world, as they left their home environments to do voluntary service in other parts of North America. These changes could not help but bring different attitudes and methods to Mennonite missions.[19]

19

Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottdale, PA, 1985); Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in 19th Century America* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988); James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America 1890-1930* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989); Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930 -1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996).

Among Mennonite scholars writing about their own missionaries among Native peoples, Lois Barrett is possibly the best. In her story of 125 years of home mission, she devotes a chapter on mission to the Cheyenne and Arapaho, one on mission to the Hopi, and a chapter in which she analyzes the American General Conference Mennonite missions. Barrett also includes a chapter on the Mennonite Pioneer Mission to the Ojibwa and Cree in Manitoba and a concluding chapter in which she questions whether an ethnic church and missions are compatible. Since mission to Native peoples was considered foreign mission until 1900, James Juhnke, in his history of Mennonite foreign missions, also inserts a short section on Mennonite missionaries in relationship with Native peoples in the United States.[20]

Mennonite Sources: Canada

Although the mandate of the *Mennonite Experience in America* series was to describe the Mennonites in all of North America, Canadian Mennonites felt the need, even before American scholars began their series, to write their own history. Frank H. Epp wrote the first two volumes of the *Mennonites in Canada* series. The first volume covers the years from 1786 to 1920 and describes Canadian Mennonites living separately from society. The next volume's scope is 1920 to 1940, the years when war, depression, and the loss of private education made inroads into Canadian Mennonite separatism.[21]

20

Lois Barrett, *The Vision and the Reality: The Story of Home Missions in the General Conference Mennonite Church* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1983). See James C. Juhnke, *A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Mission* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979), 1-13.

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Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1776-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982).

The third volume, written by T.D. Regehr, points to transformation in the Mennonite world, as urbanization increased. However, Regehr maintains that these changes were not affecting the core of Mennonite beliefs; rather, Mennonite belief became more holistic, applying faith to everyday life. In the case of missions, it meant a more practical Christianity that ministered to the body as well as the soul. It meant that all of life "must be brought into a fundamental harmony under the lordship of Christ."[22] Regehr shows that as Mennonites became less rigid, conservative and sectarian, less prone to living in closed communities and more urbanized, they changed from isolation to outreach, becoming more mission minded. As in the United States, Canadian Mennonites were a diverse group.

Regehr includes a few insightful pages about the Manitoba Mennonite Pioneer Mission/Native Ministries. He notes that initially, Mennonites thought that mission in the North would be much easier than it was. Regehr states that Mennonite anthropologists, Menno Wiebe and Jacob Loewen called upon Mennonite missionaries "to bridge a cultural and ethnic gap between themselves (primarily of Low German-Russian background) and the Saulteaux, Cree and Metis." Thus it was important to "fit the Gospel into Indian culture and not to expect or demand that the Indians accept the white people's way of life." Regehr commends Wiebe and Loewen for observing that denominationalism created huge problems and that it was better to work in cooperation with other church organizations.[23] As with the *Mennonite Experience in America* series, only Regehr writes about MPM/NM while the first two Canadian volumes,

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T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (University of Toronto Press, 1996), xxi.

[23]Regehr, 333-339.

authored by Epp, have little direct information about mission to Canada's aboriginals but provide important background knowledge about Mennonites.

Henry J. Gerbrandt's *Adventure in Faith* is a history of the Bergthaler Mennonites who began MPM, a useful source for this study.[24] In another book of personal memoirs Gerbrandt, long-time secretary of MPM, reflects on the mistakes made by Mennonites when they first encountered the people of mixed ancestry, the Ojibwa, and the Cree in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Anna Ens, Manitoba Mennonite historian, refers to an apology made to Native peoples by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1970 Both books were written in the 1990s, and demonstrate change in Mennonite thought[25]

The Mennonite Encyclopedia is a useful tool to look up any subject in which Mennonites, both Canadian and American, have been involved. The series was published jointly by the Mennonite Brethren, the General Conference, and the Mennonite Church[26] publishing agencies, with members of each group represented on the Board of Editors. The first four volumes were compiled between 1955 and 1959. An additional volume was published in 1990 to bring the series up to date.

24

Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith: The Background in Europe and the Development in Canada of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., 1979).

25

See Henry J. Gerbrandt's farewell speech in *En Route: Hingawaeajis: The Memoirs of Henry J. Gerbrandt* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1994), 211. See also the Manitoba Conference's revised statement of mission in Anna Ens, *In Search of Unity: Story of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1996), 114

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The Mennonite Church in the 1950s was made up of those Swiss Mennonites who did not join the General Conference. They were sometimes called the "old" Mennonites.

Although most of the Mennonite sources summarized above refer to the American General Conference mission or MPM/NM, they make only cursory references to these organizations. Therefore there is a need for a more comprehensive study. Newsletters written for and by missionaries, board chairpersons, and executive secretaries, provide valuable information. *The Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly*, published four times a year in Altona, Manitoba, began in 1945 and continued until 1962. Some of the early correspondence and reports are in the German language. Its purpose was to inform the Mennonite constituency and MPM missionaries about the activities at the various MPM stations. George Groening, who was also on the MPM Board, was the editor of the *Quarterly* for many years. It is a useful source, though it highlights progress to impress the readership and downplays or omits problems.

In 1965, *The Bulletin* took the place of the *Quarterly*. Its purpose was to "inform the home congregations of Conference work, to promote it, and to invite member response to projected plans."[27] *The Bulletin* published Conference of Mennonites in Canada committee reports, so that members could read them and discuss them in preparation for the conference. Among other reports, MPM/NM reports were printed in *The Bulletin*. This periodical went to every conference member.

A further source is the *Intotemak*, at first called *Totemak*, begun in 1972. *Intotemak* means "my friends" or "my relatives" or "the ones belonging to my group" or "totem."[28] The first editor was Menno Wiebe, also MPM Executive Secretary. *Totemak* was a monthly

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[27]*Bulletin*, Special Edition (May 1965).

[28]*Totemak* (1 May 1972). The name, chosen by Menno Wiebe, comes from the Ojibwe language.

newsletter sent to MPM personnel, Board, and Conference office staff. In time, all interested people could subscribe, including Native peoples. *Intotemak* is still being published in 2005, although it is threatened by budget cuts.

The *Quarterly*, the *Bulletin,* and *Totemak* provide useful materials from which to draw information about MPM/NM, but they must be used cautiously, always keeping in mind for whom the materials were written.

Hagiography and Change

The literature written by missionaries themselves indicates changes in North American Mennonite missionary thought. For example, Jake Unrau was the first missionary sent by Manitoba Mennonites through their first mission organization called Mennonite Pioneer Mission. He went to the people of mixed ancestry at Matheson Island (1948-1956) Manigotagan (1957-1965), and Selkirk (1967-1972), and to the Cheyenne at Hammon, Oklahoma (1972-1975). Unrau begins his book with himself in the centre. By 1948 when he began his missionary career, he had served in northern Canada as a conscientious objector, graduated from Elim Bible School, and had recently married Trudie Giesbrecht. His first language was German, and his education, besides Bible School, ended with grade eight. Yet he felt fully prepared for cross-cultural associations and communications.

After some years in northern Manitoba, he recounts how he began to doubt his own adequacy. He lists many virtues that he learned from the people among whom he lived, such as a holistic approach which cared for both soul and body, unconditional acceptance, rejection of stereotypes, working in community, hospitality, generosity, and patience. His book shows that towards the end of his missionary career, Unrau demonstrated willingness to dialogue with

the peoples among whom he lived and worked, a change from his earlier rigid position where he was in total control.[29]

Henry Neufeld, Mennonite Pioneer missionary to the Ojibwa at Pauingassi from 1955 to 1970, also wrote with himself as protagonist. Yet his autobiographical story of his family's years at Pauingassi manifests a changing attitude, in contrast to Unrau's early years at Matheson Island. Henry and his wife Elna, in the opening page of the book, pay a special tribute "to the elders of the Pauingassi settlement with gratitude to the whole community," thanking the Ojibwa for all the knowledge they had acquired from the Ojibwa way of life and "for the privilege" of learning the Ojibwa language.[30] The Neufelds were open to a process of two-way listening and receiving. Both Unrau and Neufeld wrote in the 1990s, many years after they were in active missions. Doubtless the memories they record in their books have been influenced by their changing perceptions and by the accepted methods and attitudes during the time when they wrote.

Malcolm Wenger was a General Conference Mennonite missionary to the Northern Cheyenne in Montana from 1944 to 1966. He published his memories of those years in 2001. Wenger's book demonstrates compassion for the Cheyenne and for the pain they experienced when two very different cultures met. Wenger comes farther in manifesting changing attitudes among Mennonite missionaries when he argues strongly for cultural relativity. For Wenger, Cheyenne culture is different from western culture but not inferior to it. This book is an

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Jake Unrau, *Living in the Way: The Pilgrimage of Jake & Trudie Unrau* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1996).

30

Henry and Elna Neufeld, *By God's Grace: Ministry with Native People in Pauingassi* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1991). Although Elna Neufeld is presented as a co-author, Henry writes in the first person singular.

important alternative and corrective to the works presenting the missionary as self-sacrificing champion. It moves from missionary as hero and teacher to missionary as equal and student.[31]

Academic Literature and Change

An exploration of academic literature is important in order to see how scholars have described Protestant missions to Native North Americans and to find out whether Mennonite missions were conducted in the same way. Further, it is interesting to discover whether Mennonite missions have been included in scholarly works about mainline Protestant missions to aboriginals. As autobiographical writing by missionaries has changed, literature written by historians and anthropologists about relationships between missionaries and aboriginal peoples has varied as well.

In the 1960s, scholars were often critical of missionary activity and adamant that missionaries were ethnocentric. American historian Robert Berkhofer, writing in 1965, argued that Protestant missionaries thought that Christianity and civilization always went together. Civilization was "an upward unilinear development of human society with the United States near the pinnacle."[32] To become Christians, Indians needed schools so that they could learn to read the Bible. Schools had to be financially supported, so they needed an economic base which to the missionaries meant farming rather than hunting. For regular attendance in church and schools, agriculture was desirable. Private farms had to be fenced in so they needed law to guard private property against theft. Since missionaries agreed with government that the white

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Esther and Malcolm Wenger, *Healing the Wounds: One Family's Journey Among the Northern Cheyenne* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001). Like Neufeld, Wenger writes in the first person singular although he includes his wife as an author.

32

Robert Berkhofer, Jr., *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Responses, 1787-1862* (University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 6.

way was vastly superior to the Indian way, there was, according to Berkhofer, no dialogue between missionaries and their Native audience. Communications went one way only.

Another American historian, Henry Warner Bowden writing in 1980, was more positive about Protestant missionaries than Berkhofer. Bowden viewed missionaries not as deliberate agents of colonialism and imperialism who intentionally robbed native peoples of their cultures, but as having positive motivations that often led to disastrous results. They were not motivated by greed or malice but they were rigid, and their inflexibility prevented them from building on native beliefs or learning from aboriginal peoples.[33]

John Webster Grant, a Canadian religious historian, argued in 1984 that the inequality of power between missionaries and Native peoples in the past discouraged Natives from accepting Christianity. Since the 1960s, Indian pride and self-awareness had increased and Protestant churches needed to listen, something they had not done well before. If white Christians listened creatively and allowed for reciprocity and dialogue and for a Christianity compatible with native modes of thought and relevant to their needs, Grant believed there could be a breakthrough "towards an indigenous Christianity" in the future.[34] According to Grant, Protestant missionaries felt compelled to spread the Gospel because they thought history would culminate with the millennial reign of Christ only when "the gospel had been diffused throughout the world."[35]

33

Henry Warner Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

34

John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (University of Toronto Press, 1984), 265-266.

[35]Grant, 9.

Another scholar who, like Grant, advocated dialogue, was anthropologist Anne Fienup-Riordan. Using the Moravian missionary John and Edith Kilbuck's journals and private correspondence as source materials, she demonstrated that the relationship between the Yup'ik in Alaska and the Kilbucks was a discourse in which both changed and neither was passively acted upon. Fienup-Riordan was less negative and more sensitive and understanding of missionaries than numerous other scholars. In her view, "the noble native ruined by meddlesome missionaries" was as much a myth as "the noble missionary bent on saving savage souls."[36]

Mennonite missions have been largely omitted in histories of Protestant missions, but have been included by historians who describe the backgrounds of specific Native tribes. These books are valuable for an understanding of the cultural background and traditional religious rites of the particular tribes discussed. Virginia Cole Trenholm, in her 1970 history of the Arapaho, made references to the activities of Mennonite missionaries Samuel Haury and Henry R. Voth and to the Mennonite school at Halstead, Kansas, modeled after the Carlisle Indian School. Trenholm's reports about the Mennonites were factual and uncritical, although she linked Mennonite missionaries with the oppressive government.[37] Donald J. Berthrong, writing about both Cheyenne and Arapaho in 1976, described Haury's relationships with the people and the Mennonite mission schools at Darlington and Cantonment, Indian Territory. He also mentioned Native young people whom the Mennonites sent to Carlisle and

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Ann Fienup-Riordan, *The Real People and the Children of Thunder: The Yup'ik Eskimo Encounter with Moravian Missionaries John and Edith Kilbuck* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 4.

37

Virginia Cole Trenholm, *The Arapahoes, Our People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 163-267, 271, 275.

Halstead. Berthrong especially noted Rodolphe Petter as a "distinguished Mennonite missionary who compiled the first Cheyenne-English dictionary and grammar."[38]

Among older sources, Frank Waters included a few paragraphs about Henry R. Voth's mission in his history of the Hopi.[39] Hopi historian Harry C. James inserted Voth's own "Historical Notes of the First Decade of the Mennonite Mission Work Among the Hopi of Arizona" into his book. The chapter in which Voth's notes are featured is called "Two Outstanding Missionaries," with Voth as one of those two missionaries, and the Presbyterian missionary Clarence G. Salsbury as the other. James wrote respectfully about Voth's important contributions to scholarly ethnographical publications.[40]

Henry Voth, with George A. Dorsey of the Chicago Field Museum, authored many ethnological summaries of Hopi ceremonies. Voth spent many hours in Hopi kivas, observing their rites, making copious notes, and drawing diagrams of their religious relics. Dorsey heard of Voth's work and became interested. Together, they published at least ten volumes of the Columbian Field Museum Collection, giving detailed descriptions of Hopi religious ceremonies. Voth's extensive ethnological descriptions actually did much to preserve a record of the very culture he was trying to destroy.[41]

38

Donald J. Berthrong, *The Cheyenne and Arapaho Ordeal: Reservation and Agency Life in the Indian Territory, 1875-1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 86-90, 100-101, 214.

[39]Frank Waters, *Book of the Hopi* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1963).

40

Harry C. James, *Pages from Hopi History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 147-158.

41

George A. Dorsey and Henry R. Voth, *Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series* (1912). *Publications of the Field Columbian Museum, Anthropological Series.* (1968).

A more recent source is Loretta Fowler in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 13 *Plains*. Fowler, in her chapter on the Arapaho, does not pay much attention to relations with missionaries. She mentions that there were two Mennonite boarding schools, that Mennonite missionaries "made little impact on Arapaho religious beliefs," and that after 1900, the Arapaho began to take leadership roles in the Mennonite church. However, she does not expand on mission work or allude to Mennonite missionaries by name as did some previous secular historians.[42] Moore, Liberty, and Straus, in their chapter on the Cheyenne, use Mennonite missionary Rodolphe Petter's English-Cheyenne dictionary as one of their sources, but mention only that there were Mennonite churches for both Northern and Southern Cheyenne.[43] The authors who write about the Hopi, in Volume 9 *Southwest* make scant reference to the Mennonite mission but they use H.R. Voth's ethnographic descriptions as one of their sources.[44] Dockstader describes Voth as "an unusual individual who seems to have turned Hopi."[45] Although the scholars who wrote in *The Handbook of North American Indians* did not seem interested in Mennonite missions, they relied heavily on sources by Petter and Voth. The extensive information drawn from these sources could possibly mean that Petter

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Loretta Fowler, "Arapaho." In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13 *Plains* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001): 840–862. Fowler mistakenly wrote that Mennonite missions to the Arapaho began in 1877.

43

John H. Moore, Margot P. Liberty, and A. Terry Strauss, "Cheyenne." In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13 *Plains* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001): 863-885.

44

J.O. Brew, "Hopi Prehistory and History to 1850": 514-523; Frederick J. Dockstader, "Hopi History, 1850-1940": 524-532; Richard O. Clemmer, "Hopi History, 1940-1974": 533-538; Arlette Frigout, Hopi Ceremonial Organization": 564-576; Louis A. Hieb, "Hopi World View": 577-580. In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 9 *Southwest* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1979).

[45]Dockstader, 527.

and Voth were more responsible for preserving knowledge of Cheyenne and Hopi cultures than for destroying them, as has been alleged. For example, Mischa Titiev wrote that Hopi conservatives hated Voth "because they held him responsible for having spread so many of their most cherished ceremonial secrets to the world at large." Yet Titiev noted that it was ironical that sometimes the Hopi used Voth's information as a source of knowledge about the past that they themselves had forgotten.[46]

Several Ph.D. dissertations have described American Mennonite missionaries to Native peoples. Wayne Marlin Adrian developed the religious paradigms of martyr and pilgrim that motivated Mennonite missionaries and their sending constituencies to bring Christianity to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi. Stanley P. Dyck detailed the activities of Mennonite missionaries to the Northern Cheyenne at the Tongue River reservation in Montana, while Cathy Ann Trotta described the work of Henry Voth among the Hopi.[47] Trotta's thesis is somewhat novel in that she defends Voth as a missionary sympathetic to the Hopi and not responsible for the factions that developed at Oraibi.

46

See Laura Thompson, *Culture in Crisis: A Study of the Hopi Indians* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 136-141. Thompson accuses Mennonites of playing a major role in the Oraibi split and of breaking down Hopi ceremonial organizations. See also Mischa Titiev, *The Hopi Indians of Old Oraibi: Change and Continuity* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1972), 342.

47

Wayne Marlin Adrian, "Mennonites, Missionaries, and Native Americans: Religious Paradigms and Cultural Encounters" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1989). Stanley P. Dyck, "Mennonites and the Northern Cheyennes: Conflict, Crisis, and Change on the Tongue River Reservation, 1904-1947 (Ph.D. diss., Oklahoma State University, 1993). Cathy Ann Trotta, "Crossing Cultural Boundaries: Heinrich and Martha Moser Voth in the Hopi Pueblos, 1893-1906" (Ph.D. diss., Northern Arizona University, 1997).

Native North American Literature and Missions

In a study of Mennonite missions to Native peoples, it is important not only to hear the Mennonite side of the story, but also to hear Native voices. Henrietta Mann, a Cheyenne historian who wrote about Cheyenne education from 1871 to 1982, included one chapter on Mennonite mission schools in Indian Territory. She argues that educating, civilizing, and Christianizing represented the "three point assimilationist policy" of the government. Mann shows that Mennonite missionaries cooperated with government to implement this policy, as did other Protestants. The first Mennonite school at Darlington offered a curriculum consisting of English education, industrial training, and "Biblical and Christian knowledge." [48]

The Hopi Don C. Talayesva (Chuka) provided some information about missionary Henry Voth through his biographer, sociologist Leo Simmons. Simmons spent many hours with Chuka, trying to capture the Hopi perspective on various subjects. Since Chuka was a child when Voth was at Orabai, his opinions about Voth and the mission are an important check and balance to Mennonite records [49] A Hopi woman, Polingaysi Quayawayma, also was a child at Oraibi during Voth's time there. Quayawayma told her story to Vada F. Carlson. Quayawayma attended many of the Mennonite services and her father worked for Voth, so her memories are an important contribution.[50]

48

Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education 1871-1982* (University Press of Colorado, 1997), 136, 180-181.

49

Don Talayesva, *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian,* ed. Leo Simmons (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 7, 41, 252. Talayesva calls Voth a " wicked man" who forced his way into the kivas.

50

Polingaysi Qoyawayma, *No Turning Back: A Hopi Indian Woman's Struggle to Live in Two Worlds,* ed. Vada F. Carlson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964).

In Manitoba Neil and Edith von Gunten, long time Native Ministries workers, have recently edited a history of Matheson Island which includes many Native voices from the Lake Winnipeg area. This book was commissioned by the Matheson Island Community Council and is a valuable source to learn about Ojibwa and mixed ancestry life ways. It also includes important information about MPM/NM.[51]

Two recent authors of mixed ancestry who lived in the area where MPM was active were Anne Monkman and Kathleen Monkman, both from Loon Straits. They wrote family histories and stories about their lives in the Lake Winnipeg area. Although they had little to say about Mennonites, their books contribute helpful information about the large extended Monkman family with whom MPM missionaries worked. Perhaps in some instances, their silence with regard to MPM missionaries is important to note.[52]

Books written by Native authors on the subject of what it means to be both Native and Christian are another way of hearing Native voices. Although these authors do not belong to the communities to whom Mennonite missionaries went, their topics apply to all people who are Christian and Native. Richard Twiss, of the Lakota/Sioux tribe, provides an important chapter on the subject of cultural syncretism, which he endorses, and religious syncretism, which he calls dangerous.[53] Another book that describes what it is like to be both Native and

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Neill and Edith von Gunten, compilers and editors. *From Paddles to Propellers The History of Matheson Island: A Fishing Community* (Matheson Island Community Council, 2003).

52

Monkman, Anne. *Loon Straits Looking Back: A Collection of real life stories, history, family tree, maps, recipes and Grannie's Cures*. Altona, MB: Friesen's Corporation History Book Divisions, 1999. Monkman, Kathleen. *Loon Straits through the Years: The Monkman Ancestry*. Self-Published, 2000.

53

Richard Twiss. *One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000).

Christian, edited by James Treat, includes both Canadian and American voices of Native Christian people from many different tribal backgrounds.[54]

Oral Sources

Both written and oral sources are important to an ethnohistorical approach, a method that asks the same questions of both missionaries and their converts. Many past missionaries, board members and teachers of Mennonite Pioneer Mission/Native Ministries are retired in Winnipeg or are available for e-mail or telephone contact. I have interviewed many of them. Malcolm Wenger and Ike Froese, former General Conference missionaries to the northern Cheyenne and the Hopi sent me their personal files. I have also interviewed some of the people who were at the receiving end of MPM--Norman and Thelma Meade from Manigotagan, Gladys Monkman from Loon Straits,[55] and Donovan Jacobs, Ojibwa employee of NM. I have had short, informative conversations with people of mixed ancestry who had connections with MPM, at the Faith Bible Camp at Victoria Beach and at jamborees. I have spoken to Cheyenne and Hopi Christians at Native Assembly 2004 and at partnership meetings.[56]

54

James Treat, ed. *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada.* New York: Routledge, (1996).

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Gladys Monkman asked me to keep some of the contents of the interview with her confidential and I have honored her request.

56

I have attended several jamborees at Riverton and also the jamboree hosted by Winnipeg churches in spring 2004, a fund raiser for Neil and Edith von Gunten. Jamborees are amateur hours where many different groups of musicians, Native and non-Native, perform. They include prizes that are raffled out and food for sale.

The next chapter, focuses on the particular branch of Mennonites that are the subject of this study and the changes that occurred in their belief system–changes that made them less isolationist and more outward looking so that they could begin to engage in missions.

Chapter Two

Mennonites and Change

History of the Mennonites

Mennonites originated from the Anabaptist movement that sprang up in Switzerland, South Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands in the sixteenth century.[57] Anabaptism has been called Left Wing Protestantism since it was more radical than the reformation under Luther and Zwingli.[58] Anabaptists wanted complete separation of church and state. Luther and Zwingli spoke about the separation of church from state, but they and their followers did not actually break with civil authorities, since they still practiced infant baptism which automatically conferred citizenship.

Anabaptists believed that baptism should be enacted upon the recipient's confession of faith, to demonstrate an informed personal decision to follow Christ in all of life. For them baptism and church membership, rather than baptism and state membership, went hand in hand. Anabaptists, after the first tumultuous years, were pacifists. They refused to fight for

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Considerable debate has taken place among Anabaptist scholars about the monogenesis of Anabaptism versus its polygenesis. Harold S. Bender, the formulator of "The Anabaptist Vision," postulated that Anabaptism began in one place only. That place was in Felix Manz's home in Zurich, Switzerland on 25 January, 1525, when Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, and Felix Mantz baptized each other. The main proponents of polygenesis are James M. Stayer, Werner Packull and Klaus Deppermann in "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49.2 (1975): 83-121. Many Anabaptist scholars now agree that Anabaptism originated in different places in the first half of the sixteenth century. See also Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptism," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol V: 23-26.

58

The terms "left wing" and "radicals" were used by Anabaptist historian Roland Bainton. Branches of Anabaptism were the Amish, the Mennonites, and the Hutterites. See Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and its Impact on Western Civilization*, Vol. II, *From the Reformation to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 37. See also Robert Friedmann, "Anabaptist," *Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. I: 115.

their country. Because Anabaptists did not become citizens of the state through infant baptism and did not go to war they were thought of as seditious. Secular and religious authorities saw the movement as "an anarchical threat to the maintenance of a united, homogeneous, obedient and serene society."[59] As a result, Anabaptists were persecuted and dispersed into many different geographical locations.

Some Anabaptists became Mennonites. Mennonites who came from southern Europe were called Swiss Mennonites. Those who came from northern Europe were called Dutch Mennonites. The leader of the Dutch Mennonites was Menno Simons, a Catholic priest who, in 1536, renounced Catholicism and joined the Anabaptist movement. Menno lived in Friesland where Anabaptism sprang up, as it had earlier in Switzerland.

Several distinctive concepts differentiated Mennonites, with their Anabaptist beliefs, from other Protestants. As Anabaptists, they believed that baptism should be conferred upon confession of faith rather than infant baptism as practiced by mainline Protestant churches. Another distinctive was non-resistance--refusal to engage in military service or to be drawn into a spirit of nationalism.[60] These differences still distinguish Mennonites from other Protestant denominations, yet they are Protestant since they originated with the reformers who broke away from Catholicism.[61] Mennonites were persecuted by Catholics under the rule of

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[59]Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, 30.

[60]

It could convincingly be argued that Mennonites were, in fact, nationalistic in Russia, not because they were willing to fight for their country, but because they were extremely loyal to the Tsars.

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Walter Klaassen's view is that Anabaptism was neither Catholic nor Protestant. (Waterloo ON: Conrad Grebel Press, 1973). Epp defines Mennonites as "the most separated brethren of the Protestant Reformation." Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, 23.

Charles V in the North and by Catholics and Zwinglians in the South, and as a result they withdrew from society and became isolated in their own communities where they presumably lived quietly and simply.[62] Swiss Mennonites immigrated to the eastern United States beginning in 1683, where they formed the Mennonite Church.[63]

Dutch Mennonites fled from the Netherlands to the Danzig area (now Gdansk), then under Polish rule, in the second half of the sixteenth century.. In the late eighteenth century the Danzig area came under German rule and became more aggressively militarized. The German government did not allow Mennonites, who refused to go to war, to buy land from non-Mennonites. As a result, many Dutch Prussian Mennonites accepted the invitation of Russia's tsarina, Catherine II, who wanted good farmers for land in Southern Russia that she had recently won from the Turks. Beginning in 1789, Mennonites settled on Russia's rich farmlands. Changes in Russia's military laws and increasing Russification in the 1870s and Russia's social upheavals in the 1920s and 1940s, caused three different waves of Mennonites to flee to North America. These Mennonites are often called Dutch Russian Mennonites, to distinguish them from the Swiss Mennonites who originated in Southern Europe and who came to Pennsylvania in large numbers in the early eighteenth century.

After the Swiss Mennonites came to Pennsylvania and spread to other American states, they lost some of their Anabaptist religious vitality. Religious renewal came through

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62

Again in Russia, Mennonites did not always live a quiet, simple lifestyle. They engaged in much strife among themselves which the Russian government had to settle. Some of them also became wealthy and lived ostentatiously.

63

See Harold S. Bender, "Mennonite Church," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. III: 611-616. A more conservative group called the Amish, who broke from the Mennonites in Europe, also came to the United States. Other more conservative Mennonites called themselves Old Mennonites.

South German Mennonites who immigrated to the United States around 1850. In 1860, fourteen years before the first Dutch Russian group immigrated to North America, some progressive Swiss Mennonite churches, who originated with the main body of conservative Mennonites in North America, formed the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.

The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, or *Allgemeine Konferenz der Mennoniten von Nord-Amerika*, came into being at West Point, Iowa in May of 1860 when three local Mennonite churches banded together to form a conference.[64] Some Swiss Mennonites had settled in Ontario by then and were quite involved in the planning stages for this conference. Mennonites in Canada and in Ohio had joined together in 1859 to form a conference and a missionary society "to spread the gospel at home and among heathen people." The Canada-Ohio conference was one of the movements toward union, although Canada was not represented at West Point in 1860, likely due to the distance involved.[65] At this first meeting, a plan was prepared for union of Mennonite churches in North America, both Canadian and American. The purpose for organization was home and foreign missions, publication, and education. These institutions were approved in principle, but no actual responsibilities were assumed or organizations put into place until 1861 when the Conference

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Minutes of the *Allgemeinen Konferenz der Mennoniten von Nord-Amerika* were printed in the German language until 1905. After that, they are in both English and German languages until 1947 and after that in English only. It seems likely that when the General Conference began in 1860, the spoken language was German.

65

H.P. Krehbiel, *The History of the General Conference of the Mennonites of North America* Vol. I: 38, 45.

met at Wadsworth, Ohio where formal union was established with sixteen churches signing the charter, two from Canada.[66]

General Conference membership was by church, not by individual members. It is significant to note that the churches who joined the Conference did not break away from any main body in schismatic fashion, in demonstration against some practice or lack thereof. Rather they joined together to accomplish a purpose. Any Mennonite church could join, but uniformity was not a requirement. The overarching policy for this new group was "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things love."[67] The General Conference Mennonite church accepted "the evangelical position of Menno Simons," adult baptism upon confession of faith, nonresistance, and the authority of the Bible. Their goal was not to reject Mennonite ideals but to become more aggressively mission minded.[68] At first, the Conference was small. By 1863, eighteen churches had joined. More Canadian Mennonite churches also joined the Conference in later years, but they did so individually, at different times.[69]

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Krehbiel, Vol I: 59-60, 82-85. The Canadian churches were "the Twenty" (Vineland/ Lincoln County area) and Waterloo, both in Ontario.

67

Pannabecker, *Open Doors*, 49, 382. This policy was a reaction to the schisms over minor issues that had divided Mennonites previously. The General Conference Mennonite church's goal was to unite all Mennonites, not to divide.

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Pannabecker, 387. Here Pannabecker's use of the term "evangelical" likely refers to its earlier German meaning as "*Evangelisch,*" the Gospel or the Good News, rather than the narrower fundamentalist meaning often ascribed to it in English.

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The Manitoba Bergthaler churches that began Mennonite Pioneer Mission joined the General Conference in 1968. See Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 354-360. See also Pannabecker, *Open Doors*, 159.

Meanwhile in Russia, where many Mennonites of the Dutch Russian stream lived, several branches of Mennonites had defected from the main body of Mennonites. The first branch to leave was the *Kleine Gemeinde* which began its own organization in 1812. The Mennonite Brethren left the main group in 1860. Various other small groups also defected from time to time. The remaining group of Russian Mennonites (that group from which the *Kleine Gemeinde* and the Mennonite Brethren separated) ranged from traditionalist and communitarian[70] congregations to more progressive and even missionary oriented groups.

The large wave of Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to North America in the 1870s included Mennonites from the *Kleine Gemeinde*, the Mennonite Brethren, and the more conservative Dutch Russian group, among them the Bergthaler, who left Russia as a whole village and settled in Manitoba.[71] Some of the more pietistic Dutch Russian Mennonites had a prior history of sending missionaries, but not under their own mission board. They had sent missionaries from Russia to Java and Sumatra under the auspices of the Dutch Mennonite Mission Association.[72] Many Dutch Russian Mennonites who immigrated joined the General

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Gerald W. Schlabach, University of Toronto, has defined communitarianism as Christians "joining their daily lives together in practical down-to-earth ways as they offer one another mutual aid....Structures and institutions are welcomed but only as tools to enable shared discernment." *One in Christ* (April 2000): 3.

71

See Adolf Ens, *Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada* (Winnipeg: CMU Publications, 2004), 1-4. More will be said about the Bergthaler, the founders of Mennonite Pioneer Mission, in chapter 4.

72

Harold S. Bender, "Dutch Mennonite Mission Association" *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II: 113-114. The Dutch Mennonite Mission Association was also called *Doopsgesinde Vereniging tot Evangelieverbreiding*.

Conference Mennonite church soon after coming to the United States.[73] Those in Canada organized by colony, the Old Colony and the Bergthaler Mennonites. The latter group split into three by 1892, the communitarian Sommerfelder and Chortitzer groups and the more progressive group which retained the name Bergthaler.

Russian Mennonites had some previous experience with developing institutions and governing themselves locally in Russia. Some historians see their coming as instrumental in the formation of the mission movement.[74] Although this new wave of Mennonites strongly endorsed and strengthened the heightened interest in missions, the General Conference began without them and would likely have sent out missionaries without the new influx. A.B. Shelly, of Swiss Mennonite background, was the president of the General Conference from 1872 to 1896. Shelly was also the Secretary of the Board of Missions and on the Board of Publications for many years. Christian Krehbiel, also of Swiss Mennonite background, was another influential man who was President of the General Conference Board of Missions for 24 years and on the Board of Publications during the early formative stages. Carl Justus van der Smissen from Germany, teacher at Wadsworth Institute, was Secretary of the Board of Missions before Shelly.[75] However, the Russian Mennonites were a major influence after they joined the General Conference.

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[73] The General Conference was made up of Dutch Russians and progressive Swiss Mennonite churches. Swiss Mennonites who did not join the General Conference continued to be known as the Mennonite Church. *Kleine Gemeinde* and Mennonite Brethren members did not join the General Conference.

[74] Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War,* 141-142; Adrian, 8; Stanley Dyck, 68.

[75] See Krehbiel, Vol. I, xi, 338. Christian Krehbiel was the father to H.P. Krehbiel, Mennonite historian who published the two volumes of the General Conference history. More will be said about Wadsworth Institute below.

Although Mennonites in the United States and Canada formed district conferences after the General Conference came into being, the General Conference, rather than the district conferences, was responsible for foreign missions, publication, home missions, and higher education in both the United States and Canada.[76]

What motivated quietist North American Mennonites to form the General Conference and to become activists? One motivator was a change in the ideology of some progressive thinkers. Traditionally, Mennonites believed that government was instituted by God to restrain the evil in the Kingdom of this World (secular society) by force. Christians, however, were strangers and pilgrims who were not part of the Kingdom of this World. Though they were in this world, they were not of this world. They believed that they should respect government and pay their taxes, but should stay out of politics and war and remain in their own separate communities.[77] Progressive Mennonites, however, felt that they had responsibilities for community and state affairs. Progressives saw "the nation as a positive agency to promote God's righteousness, his kingdom, and the reign of peace." They wanted to "promote the Gospel and God's kingdom actively and directly."[78]

Although Mennonite historians have usually thought that the Two-Kingdom world was central to the Mennonite belief system until after World War II, it seems that General Conference missionaries were already moving from quietism to activism in the 1880s. They

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[76]Krehbiel, Vol. I, 353.

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Although Mennonites stayed out of politics, Richard MacMaster argues that they were not really separated from their neighbors who belonged to other denominations. MacMaster writes that Mennonites in some communities in the 18th centuries were "like fish in water," living among and relating to their Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed neighbors. *Land, Piety, Peoplehood*, 138.

[78]Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 142-164.

moved from their belief in a Two-Kingdom world to the conviction that they were responsible, not only for their own world, but also for the wider world of society. Their more relaxed view of the Two Kingdom world allowed Mennonite missionaries to work closely with the American government in their mission programs but, as Theron Schlabach observes, "the close ties with government were odd for Mennonites with their history of pacifism and church-state separatism."[79]

As they became more activist,[80] Mennonite missionaries were influenced by mainline Protestant patterns. Juhnke notes that Anabaptist missions were "twice born." In the sixteenth century, Anabaptist missionaries were persecuted by other Protestants after Anabaptists broke away from Catholics, Lutherans and Zwinglians. In the nineteenth century, Mennonite missions imitated mainline Protestants, who had once persecuted them, and followed their models for missions. Juhnke states: "Nineteenth century Mennonites, whose Anabaptist forbears had had the missionary spirit beaten out of them by Protestant persecutors, now came to drink at Protestant wells for the renewal of the missionary spirit."[81]

Marlin Wayne Adrian, in his Ph.D. dissertation, observes that General Conference Mennonites were motivated by the paradigms of the martyr and the pilgrim. In North America, they lived in peace and tolerance and some became prosperous, yet they had previously been a persecuted group whose kingdom was not of this world. To keep their identity of martyr and

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[79]Schlabach, 288.

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The term "activist" here must be distinguished from 20th century activism when non-resistance took on a new meaning--not only refusal to bear arms but a new resolve to actively stand with the oppressed and lobby for justice. This change happened largely as a result of the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

[81]Juhnke, *A People of Mission*, 2-3.

pilgrim alive, they sacrificially gave their money and their sons and daughters for the cause of missions as a way of suffering vicariously to assuage their consciences. Mennonite constituency members lived in security while they sent missionaries who represented them as martyrs and pilgrims. These missionaries denied their own peace and safety to go to the mysterious unknown–the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi reservations and, after 1900, across the ocean to India, Africa, and China. People at home could feel less guilty for their own comforts when they supported missionaries who went into unknown, uncomfortable places on their behalf.[82]

To give new ideologies a practical vehicle, Mennonites needed to organize. The purpose of the General Conference was to unite congregations for strength and resources to begin missions. Educational institutions were needed to train missionaries and pastors. Newspapers were necessary to inform scattered Mennonites in America about agendas for future conferences and about missions projects. Concerns for education, missions, and publications were fairly innovative ideas for American Mennonites. It is important to note that these significant changes were taking place before and during the Civil War, in difficult times and with limited finances.

Education

An important reason for organizing the General Conference in 1860 was to plan for a theological seminary to train leaders who would be effective in spreading God's Word. Daniel Hege, a Mennonite from Ohio, traveled extensively during the Civil War (even to Canada) to raise funds for the establishment of a school. As a result of his successful

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Adrian, 62. Adrian does not discuss the problems that the Civil War brought to Mennonites in the 1860s. Mennonites usually held their wealth in the form of land so their resources were not always fluid. See also MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood,* 85, 86.

campaign, the *Christliche Bildungs-Anstalt der Mennoniten Gemeinschaft* was established at Wadsworth, Ohio. It was also called the Wadsworth Institute after the town in which it was located.[83] The school was dedicated at the fourth session of the General Conference, held in 1866 at Wadsworth. In his conference sermon, Christian Krehbiel said:

> Some may maintain that such a school is not a necessity inasmuch as our fathers did not have such institutions....How great is the need for such an institution in which faithful workers may be trained for carrying on the Lord's work! Do not many thousands heathen still pine in the dark shadows of death to whom the glad tidings of peace have not yet been preached![84]

Carl Justus van der Smissen, a Mennonite pastor from Germany with university education, was called to be the principal of the school. Van der Smissen and his family influenced students positively toward European culture, Sunday school, and missions. Courses offered were church history, Bible study, and homiletics, taught mostly in the German language. Samuel Haury, the first missionary to the Cheyenne and Arapaho, and Henry R. Voth, the first missionary to the Hopi, were both educated at the Wadsworth Seminary. The school closed in 1878 because of financial problems, friction among faculty members, and tensions between eastern and western Mennonites, but many future church leaders and missionaries had been influenced by the European pietism of its teachers.[85] It was fifteen years

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Samuel F. Pannabecker, "Wadsworth Mennonite School," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. IV: 806-807.

84

Krehbiel, Vol. I, 129. This quotation demonstrates the attitude of someone who was later on the Foreign Mission Board toward the peoples to whom the Board sent missionaries. They were "heathen" who were waiting for the Gospel and thus would accept it quickly and easily.

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Pannabecker, *Open Doors*, 58. Pannabecker attributes the school's closing to lack of experience and business knowledge.

before the next General Conference institution for higher education opened its doors. Bethel College at Newton, Kansas, which began in 1893, grew out of the Halstead Mennonite boarding school.[86] Bluffton College, another General Conference school, opened in Ohio in 1914, and other colleges followed.

In the early twentieth century, Mennonite colleges suffered from the impact of the fundamentalist/modernist debate that was prevalent at the time. This was actually a Protestant, rather than a Mennonite debate, but the repercussions spread into the Mennonite world. In the late nineteenth century, many mainline Protestant churches responded to textual criticism, Darwinism, science, technology, and progress by returning to the fundamentals of the Bible. Fundamentalism was characterized by dispensationalist thinking,[87] literalism based on the King James version of the Bible, and militancy against those with different views. Fundamentalists emphasized salvation of the soul rather than care for the body. Evangelical revivalists were in the fundamentalist camp while social gospel proponents were in the modernist camp. Fundamentalism divided Mennonites who supported evangelists and missionaries who preached the Gospel from those who supported the Mennonite Central Committee, established in 1920, an organization that emphasized relief of physical needs and social justice issues. The earlier holistic approach was sacrificed, as individuals or groups chose to align with either

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Christian Krehbiel was the founder of the Halstead boarding school to which Mennonite missionaries sent Cheyenne and Arapaho students. More will be said about this school later.

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Dispensationalism followed the teaching of Cyrus I. Scofield who maintained that Jesus would soon return to earth and set up a kingdom that would last a thousand years. Christ's sermon on the mount applied to that coming kingdom, not to the present age; therefore his followers should be more concerned about salvation of people's souls than justice issues that applied to this world. Scofield was a late nineteenth century Bible teacher who published a version of the Bible called the Scofield Bible. See Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 22, 117, 258, 312.

fundamentalists or modernists. Mennonite colleges were accused of liberalism and identified with modernism, because they taught higher criticism of the Bible and were often on the cutting edge with new ideas. Goshen College, an "old" Mennonite College, closed for the school year 1923 to 1924, to reorganize and regroup in order to please a critical constituency.[88] Although General Conference colleges did not close, the Fundamentalist/Modernist debate had a profound impact on them as well, and also on future missionaries who studied there.

Canadian Mennonites were even more wary of higher education than American Mennonites. In the 1870s wave of emigration from Russia, conservatives and communitarians tended to go to Canada rather than to the United States. The 1920s wave, which came only to Canada, slowed the transition from the German to the English language. German language and culture were considered crucial for religious continuity. The first schools beyond private elementary schools were the teacher training institutions; the Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Gretna, Manitoba, begun in 1889, and the German-English Academy at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, begun in 1905.

Bible schools, mostly of fundamentalist character, were begun in Canada between 1907 and 1940. Epp observes that most of these schools "were viewed as bastions of the faith not only in opposition to secular education but also over against those church colleges which combined biblical and theological education with the liberal arts...which were viewed as hotbeds of religious liberalism and modernism."[89] The main reason for establishing Bible schools was so that Mennonite youth could be educated at their own schools instead of

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[88] James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War,* 257-269. See also Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, 52-56.

[89] Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940,* 469.

attending schools of other denominations, in which case they might be lost as future Mennonite leaders and missionaries.

In 1947 the Canadian Mennonite Bible College was established in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Its four programs of study were theology, Christian education, missions, and music. Its purpose was "to help define, interpret, and preserve Mennonite doctrines, applying them to the changed circumstances of their time." Because conservative constituency members viewed the Bible College as a liberal religious school, they criticized the school as did their American counterparts. Bible Colleges, in contrast to Bible schools, taught higher biblical interpretation, and as a result their theological views were sometimes held suspect by the constituency. The Canadian Mennonite Bible College emphasized their "Anabaptist heritage" more than "North American evangelicalism" which was making inroads into many churches.[90]

Missions

A second reason for beginning the General Conference was to begin an active missions program. The Iowa meeting in 1860 had clearly identified that the purpose for founding an educational institute was to train future leaders and missionaries. The General Conference wished to initiate mission to aboriginal people in the United States, but it was unprepared when Samuel Haury declared himself ready to go to a mission field. Haury was one of five young men in Wadsworth's first graduating class of 1871. However, because the General Conference had not yet organized a mission board, Haury applied to and was accepted by the Mennonite Missionary Society of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. The first General Conference mission board was elected in 1872 so that the General Conference could have their own independent program with Haury as their missionary. They appointed A.B. Shelly, Christian Showalter,

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[90]Regehr, 266.

C.J. van der Smissen, Christian Krehbiel, and J.H. Oberholtzer to their mission board.[91] The first four members listed remained in the board for twenty-five years or more, which must have given a sense of stability and permanence to the organization, but perhaps also a dearth of new ideas. The members of the mission board were farmer/preachers, who had little understanding of cross-cultural encounters, and who had limited finances. Pannabecker observes that in spite of their backgrounds, these board members deserve much respect for their courage in dealing with complicated issues and problems.[92]

Mennonites began their mission to the Cheyenne and Arapaho in Indian Territory (later the State of Oklahoma) in 1880. President Ulysses S. Grant's Peace Policy was established in 1870, following advice given to him by the Quakers and other reformers that he should pursue a policy of peace with Native peoples, rather than eradicating them through war. Under Grant's peace policy, each Protestant denomination was assigned to a specific reservation in order to eliminate competition. Grant appointed Quakers, as well as some army officers, as Indian agents.[93]

When the General Conference looked for a location for their mission, they found that the areas in which they were interested were already taken by other denominations.[94] The

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[91]Krehbiel, Vol.1, 182-192.

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Pannabecker 285. The names of these leaders are Swiss or German Mennonite names, not from the Dutch Russian Mennonite stream. Obviously the General Conference was most strongly influenced by these men for its first twenty-five years rather than by Russian Mennonite leaders.

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See Francis Paul Prucha, *American Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indians, 1865-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 46-52.

[94]

They must have looked for safe areas where Indians had already been pacified or put on reservations by the government.

Presbyterians and the Russian Orthodox church had been allocated to Sitka, Alaska (an area Haury investigated as a possible mission field) and the Quakers had been designated to the Cheyenne and Arapaho in Indian Territory. However, in 1880, Indian Agent Miles, a Quaker, invited the Mennonites to work with the Arapaho in Indian Territory. The Quakers were finding that work among both Arapaho and Cheyenne was too much for them, so the Bureau of Indian Affairs allowed the Quakers to give part of their work to another denomination. A few years later, the Quakers handed the Cheyenne mission over to the Mennonites as well. It is important to note that the Cheyenne and Arapaho had been confined to the small reservation in Indian Territory only since 1875. Their whole way of life was changing, as the buffalo were decimated and they had to find a new means of livelihood. Quakers and then Mennonites were sent to help them with these major adjustments.[95]

Under Grant's Peace Policy, missionaries worked together with government to educate the Indians. One goal of the Peace Policy was to gather the Indians in reservations and to teach them "the arts of agriculture, and such pursuits as are incident to civilization, through the aid of the Christian organizations of the country now engaged in this work, cooperating with the federal government." Other goals were to establish schools and churches so that "these savages" could begin to "appreciate the comforts and benefits of a Christian civilization" and finally become citizens of the United States.[96]

The story of Mennonite-related missions to aboriginals in Manitoba was quite different from the United States. The Mennonites who came to Canada in the 1870s settled in

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See John H. Seger, *Early Days Among the Cheyenne & Arapahoe Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 3-9.

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Quoted from a summary of the peace policy by the U.S. secretary of the interior in Barrett, 20.

Manitoba, where missions to aboriginals began in 1944, over sixty years later than General Conference missions in the United States. There were good reasons for this late start. Canadian Mennonite history is vastly different from American Mennonite history. Canada drew more communitarian branches in the 1870s, while the United States attracted the more progressive branches. Then, too, during the two immigration waves of the 1920s and the 1940s to 50s, many Mennonites from Russia came to Canada, while no Mennonites went to the United States because of their strict immigration laws. The 1870s wave of Mennonites gave generously to help with a massive relief program for the new immigrants, leaving less money for missions.[97] Language transition from German to English came more slowly in Canada because of these new immigrants, especially in Manitoba where the largest groups of Russian Mennonites settled. The new influx may have delayed some Canadian Mennonite churches from joining the General Conference and held back the beginnings of missionary efforts until 1944.[98]

Publications

A third reason given in Iowa in 1860 for organizing a General Conference was the necessity for publications to circulate conference and missions reports. Small, privately run Mennonite papers had been distributed since 1852 when John H. Oberholtzer published the *Religoeser Botschafter* which later became the *Volksblatt,* and in 1867, the *Friedensbote.* H.P. Krehbiel, Mennonite historian, believes that early publications with their opportunities to

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See Krehbiel, Vol. II, 231, 245. Although David Toews, the Chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, solicited financial aid from American Mennonites, they were not directly involved as Canadian Mennonites were. See also Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940,* 157-178.

[98]Pannabecker, 281.

exchange ideas led to the union of American and Canadian Mennonites into a General Conference. The idea of a denominational school to prepare young men for ministry and missions also first appeared in the *Volksblatt* in 1860.[99]

The first American General Conference publication board was formed in 1881. Three of its members, A.B. Shelly, Christian Krehbiel, and Christian Showalter, were also on the Board of Missions. Several small papers that had begun earlier, *Friedensbote, Zur Heimat,* and *Nachrichten aus der Heidenwelt*, merged in 1882 into *Christlicher Bundesbote*, the official biweekly organ of the General Conference. Isaac Sommer, a Wadsworth graduate, was the editor of the *Bundesbote* from 1884 to 1911. Then in 1912, C.H. van der Smissen, son of the Wadsworth professor, took over the editorship until 1930. *The Mennonite,* a monthly English paper, was begun by eastern Mennonites in 1885 and was taken over by the General Conference in 1902. Isaac Sommer was the editor of this paper as well. Obviously, the Wadsworth seminary was a major influence in publications. To have three members of the Board of Missions on the Board of Publications meant that missions had a major forum in the periodicals.

The purpose of publications was to inform the constituency and other Mennonites about the existence and activities of the General Conference and especially to stimulate missions. The needs were both for money and for service. Since the Cheyenne and Arapaho mission was located close to the General Conference constituency, members could perform short term service in such areas as farming, sewing, cooking, and teaching. From 1880 to 1900, seventy-five Mennonites helped in some capacity at the mission. Mennonites also

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H.P. Krehbiel, vol. 1, 20, 42. John F. Funk, an influential forerunner in Mennonite publication, is not included in this study because he was not in the General Conference stream.

contributed food and clothes to the mission for emergency relief.[100] Mennonite publications acquainted General Conference members with the needs and activities of their missionaries.

In Canada, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada designated *the Christlicher Bundesbote* as its "official organ" in 1926.[101] *The Canadian Mennonite,* a weekly paper in the English language, began in 1953. The first editor was Frank H. Epp. Epp's major concerns were social justice issues and uniting the various groups of Mennonites (Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Church, and General Conference) into one body. As a result, the paper had an ecumenical flavor.[102] *The Canadian Mennonite* ended publication in 1971 and was followed by *The Mennonite Reporter*. Reports of Mennonite missionaries to aboriginals were also printed in the *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* and after 1965 in the *Bulletin: Conference of Mennonites in Canada.* The official paper of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada after 1996 was again named *Canadian Mennonite*.

Change among Mennonites

Mennonites changed as they responded to the freedom, wealth, nationalism, individualism, industrialism, and revivalism they experienced in America. Anabaptists had been a persecuted group who had suffered for their faith. In America's open, pluralistic society, Mennonites were not persecuted, so conservative members looked for an alternative to the suffering that had been a central component of their faith. Schlabach's view is that conservative Mennonites substituted the concept of *Demut* or humility as a counter-cultural

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[100]Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 10. Here missions was not far away, as was usually the case.

[101]H.P. Krehbiel, *The History of the Mennonite Church of North America,* Vol. 2 (Newton, KS: Herald Publishing Co., 1938), 176. The Conference of Mennonites in Canada was officially organized in 1903.

[102]Regehr, 386-391.

alternative for suffering while progressive Mennonites were attracted to the revivalism and pietism of American Protestants. The danger inherent in progressive belief was that it replicated the American idea that "God had manifestly destined the Anglo-Saxon peoples and nations to uplift and Christianize the world."[103] With manifest destiny came the belief in cultural superiority, that civilization and Christianity were one inseparable package. Schlabach observes that the first Mennonite mission, the one that sent missionaries to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi, "worked within an ideology held by benevolent-minded Americans who were sure that to save Indians they had to teach them Christianity and white culture hand-in-hand, make them Americans, and assimilate them."[104]

The General Conference was begun in 1860 in the spirit of progress, marking a major change from the earlier traditionalist, isolationist Mennonite mentality. H.P. Krehbiel, Mennonite historian, exuded confidence and optimism in his first volume of the history of the Mennonites, written in 1878. Krehbiel wrote: "Mankind is slowly but steadily advancing toward the reception of those doctrines of our Lord Jesus Christ which apply to practical life." The General Conference, Krehbiel opined, came into being when the "fire of religious life" was almost extinct among Mennonites.[105] Progress was being made; changes were taking place. But Krehbiel observed that progress was not uniform in all places since some people ridiculed new advances while others received them. He was obviously describing those churches who joined the General Conference as progressive, and those who did not join as intolerant and narrow-minded.

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[103]Schlabach, 30, 164.

[104]Schlabach, 287.

[105]Krehbiel, Vol. 1: 1, 45.

Although the Wadsworth Seminary lasted for only eleven years, its very existence indicated change among American Mennonites, as did the formation of the General Conference Mennonite church. Wadsworth Seminary was the American Mennonites' first attempt at higher education. To train leaders was a major change from the reliance on the farmer lay ministers who had served Mennonite churches in the past. The rationale for training was that faith came through the Bible and preaching, but ministers needed education to understand the Bible in order to be effective in helping others to understand it.[106] Yet their education was limited since no thought was given to cross-cultural or language studies in preparation for missions. In fact, instruction was mostly in the German language. However, Wadsworth teachers emphasized evangelism and missions, subjects not stressed by Mennonites in the past. One graduate described his training as "the breaking away from formalism and the beginning of intelligent, aggressive work for the Master."[107]

The new Conference with its innovative educational efforts involved major challenges for American Mennonites who were not accustomed to reaching out. Heretofore they had been known as *Die Stillen im Lande* (the quiet in the land), many still speaking mostly German, concerned about living a peaceful God-fearing life in their own communities. Rodolphe Petter, Mennonite missionary to the Cheyenne, read a paper on the dangers of modernism and higher criticism at the 1902 General Conference session. Although Petter was one of the General Conference's more highly educated members, he was quite conservative in his thinking. Petter's paper resulted in the following resolution: "The Conference earnestly warns against the injurious teachings of the so-called higher critics and against all negative tendencies which

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[106] Krehbiel, Vol. 1: 83.

[107] James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War,* 133.

question the authenticity of the Bible and endanger the faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God."[108] The resolution demonstrated the wariness that even progressive Mennonites still felt toward higher education and textual criticism. They were so threatened that they thought the very core of their faith was at stake when the literal text of the Bible came under careful scrutiny.

To begin a missionary program was a major development. With the General Conference's interest in missions came a new vocabulary, new organizations, new leaders, new claims on its financial and human resources, and a loss of the traditional simplicity, humility, and separateness that had previously characterized Mennonites.[109] Juhnke observes:

> The Mennonites were a religious, ethnic minority group which was emerging from centuries of isolation and introversion. Mission work was a primary event in this awakening. As such, the missionary endeavor proved more meaningful for the Mennonite progressive spirit than for the liberation of downtrodden Native Americans.[110]

Juhnke sees the Mennonite mission endeavor as a "coming out into the world" from a background of isolation brought about by persecution. Conservative Mennonites thought of missions as a threat–an unequal yoking with other Protestants and "fraught with the dangers of creeping worldliness."[111] But Pannabecker writes: "It is hardly too much to say that the General Conference was born in the missionary movement." During the early years of General

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[108]Krehbiel, Vol. 2, 75.

[109]Juhnke, *A People of Mission*, 207. Although Juhnke writes about foreign mission, he includes a short chapter on mission to the Native peoples of the United States because in 1880, this mission was designated as foreign mission.

[110]James C. Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 14.

[111]Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 207, 6.

Conference formation, its member churches maintained a united interest in missions. Missions became the cement that held the Conference together.[112]

In conducting missions, Mennonites were not only joined with mainline Protestants but also with other peoples whom they hoped to convert. With new converts of other racial backgrounds, came the threat that Mennonite churches would no longer be ethnically pure.[113] Incorporating "the other" was a major departure from tradition. Lois Barrett wonders if an ethnic church can effectively reach out to people of another ethnicity. She asks whether converts with other cultural backgrounds really became Mennonites and she concludes that new mission churches had "few ties with the rest of the General Conference" during pre World War II years.[114]

Publication was the vehicle through which new ways of being were introduced to the Mennonite readership. Progressive men, who were becoming acculturated to American Protestant ways of thinking, began Mennonite periodicals and articulated their ideas in those periodicals, thus leading the way for the formation of the General Conference and the establishment of institutions of higher learning beginning with the Wadsworth Seminary. The transition from "quietism to activism" was difficult and "the language of discourse and communication became important in that transition."[115] Mennonite periodicals made the

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[112]Pannabecker, 62.

[113]Intermarriage was a real concern. For example, when Jake and Trudie Unrau's daughter wanted to marry a Christian Matheson Island man of mixed ancestry in 1973, the pastor of a Winnipeg Mennonite church refused to officiate. Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002.

[114]Barrett, 271.

[115]Regehr, 386.

change from the German language to the English language, blazing the trail for churches to follow. *The Canadian Mennonite* was prophetic and critical in tone, a change from the devotional style of former Mennonite papers.

Education, missions, and publications brought major change to the core identity of Mennonitism. Although organization into boards was an innovation for Mennonites, the General Conference appointed a mission board and a publication board. Institutions, agencies, and programs were a shift from traditional congregational life. Progressive Mennonites were now engaged in aggressive work in contrast to their traditional humility.

Barrett observes: "The history of home missions in the General Conference Mennonite Church is the history of the changing definition of what it means to be a Mennonite." Formerly faith and culture were inextricably tangled in Mennonite consciousness. With the advent of outreach, General Conference Mennonites were caught "between tradition and innovation," "Anabaptism and Pietism," and "ethnic separateness and ethnic pluralism." Polarities resulted in tension. "To be truly missionary might mean disruption of the Mennonite unity between faith and culture."[116] Such insights came many years after the first Mission Board and the early missionaries began their contacts with other cultures. They likely viewed missions through lenses clouded with a film of triumphalism, pietism, and idealism. There was also a dimension of romantic heroism for the first missionaries who gave up the comforts of home to go to the strange "other." Krehbiel described Haury's beginnings in Indian Territory as follows:

> As pioneer missionary of the Mennonites of America it was not an easy matter for Haury to go forth into the mission field. Back of him as his supporters stood a weak, ecclesiastically unorganized and spiritually almost dormant denomination. Before him

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[116]Barrett, 269.

> was a hard, wild and barbarous people, proverbially difficult to evangelize. When on the field and in the presence of stolid heathendom, the great difficulty of the task rose up before him as never before, and discouragement seemed to overwhelm him.[117]

The above quotation demonstrates that Mennonites did not think the Arapaho and Cheyenne possessed any cultural or social qualities worth saving. Their missionaries were responsible to replace "heathendom" with Christianity and "barbarity" with "civilization." They acknowledged that this would be a difficult undertaking, but God was on their side so they would be victorious over the powers of evil. Understanding of the importance of cross cultural issues came into the missionaries' consciousness much later, as we will see when we contrast attitudes of early Mennonite missionaries with attitudes of missionaries in the 1960s. The next chapter examines specific case histories of the first General Conference missionaries, to discover how they related to Native peoples in the late nineteenth century.

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[117]Krehbiel, Vol. I, 249-250.

Chapter Three

General Conference Mennonite Missions in Oklahoma and Arizona (1880-1900)

If gaining converts with different ethnic backgrounds meant disruption to the traditional Mennonite church, why did Mennonites send missionaries to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi? Steven Runciman, Byzantine historian, wrote in 1955 that those who are convinced that they have "the key and guiding principle of Life" cannot allow others to "flounder blindly in the darkness....No really religious man can pass the unbeliever by and do nothing."[118] Because Mennonite missionaries who arrived in the American West believed that they had the only true faith, the one way to God, their primary goal was to convert the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Hopi to Christianity. They were convinced that the Jesus of the Bible could provide hope and eternal life for Native peoples. The Mission Board, elected at the sixth General Conference held at Wadsworth in 1872, was instructed by the delegates "to engage actively in foreign mission work–that is the spread of the Gospel among heathen."[119]

This chapter will profile the lives, methods and attitudes of the first three General Conference Mennonite missionaries, Samuel Haury, H.R. Voth, and Rodolphe Petter, who went to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi in Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) and Arizona.

Samuel S. Haury

The first General Conference Mennonite missionary to Native North Americans was Samuel S. Haury who, with his wife Susanna Hirschler Haury, went to the Arapaho at

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Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge University Press, 1955), 1.

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Krehbiel, Vol. I, 222. Native North Americans came under the category of foreign missions in 1872. See also *Christlicher Bundesbote* (19 March 1896).

Darlington[120] in Indian Territory in 1880. Haury, born in Germany, was of Swiss Mennonite background. He graduated from Wadsworth Seminary in 1871 where he was influenced towards missions by Carl Justus van der Smissen. After Haury graduated, he studied theology at Barmen, Germany (a missionary training school) and then began a medical course which he could not complete because of illness. After he recovered he, together with the Mennonite mission board, searched for a suitable mission location. When the Quakers offered to give up the Arapaho field in Indian Territory, the Mennonites accepted it.[121] Their mission was located at Darlington in 1880 and after 1883 also at Cantonment. With the opening of a second mission, the Haurys moved to Cantonment and Haury became the superintendent of both stations, the principal of the Cantonment school, and the government subagent for Darlington. In1887, Haury was accused of sexual indiscretion and consequently resigned. He returned to studies, graduated from medical college, and then practiced medicine in Moundridge, Kansas among non-natives.[122]

Haury's Methods

When Haury went to Indian Territory only eleven years after the Arapaho and Cheyenne had been confined to their small reservation, he expressed sympathy for them. In their new location they had, until recently, been under military surveillance. Haury reflected:

> Can we wonder that they hated the whites–their oppressors? Or that they were rebellious and repelled everything originating with the palefaces? Filled with bitterest

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[120] Darlington was named after Brinton Darlington, a Quaker, the first Indian agent in Indian Territory. Much of Indian Territory later became the state of Oklahoma. See Seger, 3.

[121] Ed. G. Kaufman, "Haury, Samuel S," *Mennonite Encyclopedia,* Vol. II: 680.

[122] Barrett, 21-22.

> animosity...they also repelled the Gospel, for was not that the religion of their hated oppressors?[123]

Nevertheless, Haury's purpose was to bring Christianity and "civilization" to the Cheyenne and Arapaho. He held occasional Sunday services for adults at Indian camps and Sunday school for children, both through an interpreter.[124]

Haury expected the Arapaho and Cheyenne to adopt Mennonite life-styles after they accepted Christ. In his view, they had no proper family life because of their "heathen" duties and responsibilities toward their large circle of relatives. They did not know how to live in permanent dwellings and work to provide for the future. Haury planned to begin a colony for Christian Natives so that they would break with "the foolishness of their religion, their customs, practices, and life-ways" and live in individual, independent households. Nuclear family life, such as Mennonites practiced, was completely foreign to Indians, yet Haury thought that Christianity without it was unthinkable.[125]

Haury's method was to educate the children, both in secular and religious subjects. His school was like mainline Protestant residential schools, with academic and labour components in which girls learned housekeeping and needlework and boys worked outside.[126] To support the school and the mission, Haury opened a fifteen-acre farm where the older boys

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[123] Quoted in Trenholm, 266. In 1869, the Arapaho and Cheyenne were confined to a smaller reservation by executive order of the president. See map in Seger, 2.

[124] The interpreter was a returned Carlisle student. The Arapaho and Cheyenne had sent children to the Carlisle Industrial School, begun by Captain Pratt in1879 in Pennsylvania. See Mann, 49, 70-71.

[125] *Beilage zum Bundesbote* (January 1883).

[126] Mann, 70.

were taught agriculture.[127] However, Haury's main purpose was to teach the children biblical knowledge, hoping that they would win their parents to "civilized" Christianity. He wrote: "We must not lose sight of the fact that the older Indians will be hard to win."[128] He also hoped that educated Cheyenne and Arapaho children would become teachers and workers in the mission school.[129] He felt that he was making progress when some of the Arapaho and Cheyenne saw the necessity of schools, increased their acres under cultivation, and worked on their farms instead of attending traditional ceremonies.[130]

In 1882, the government provided $5,000 to build a new school at Darlington after the first school building burned down.[131] They also offered the Cantonment military base to Mennonites to use as a school and a mission station. Haury and H.R. Voth, about whom more will be said below, viewed their acquisition of Cantonment as fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 2:4 that swords would be made into plowshares and spears into sickles. To them, Cantonment was a gift from God which they accepted without reluctance. They did not stop to think that the Arapaho and Cheyenne likely connected the army, who had subdued them, with the Mennonite missionaries, who now occupied the buildings. Haury and Voth raised a white flag signifying peace, expecting the Arapaho and Cheyenne to understand that the fort was

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[127]Bergthrong, 88.

[128]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (July 1883): 103.

[129]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (July 1883): 103.

[130]*The Mennonite* (November, 1886): 26.

[131]
Krehbiel, Vol. I, 291-292. The Haury's lived in the school building and their son perished in the fire together with three Indian children who were staying with them.

now a place of blessing rather than a place of punishment.[132] From the Native perspective, however, as they observed Mennonite missionaries and a militaristic government working together, "the separation of church and state was a myth."[133]

School and church programs were more easily run when Indians were settled in one permanent location, so Mennonites planned to make Cantonment an Arapaho/Cheyenne colony. The location was ideal because the prominent Arapaho chiefs' camps were near Cantonment. The Arapaho and Cheyenne, however, did not understand colonization and doubtless it was not explained to them very well. Chief Little Raven, the Arapaho ritual chief of highest rank, claimed all the property and moved his horses into the former bakery, much to the exasperation of the missionaries.[134]

The acceptance of government funds and buildings demonstrated that Mennonite missionaries worked under government control as other Protestants did. If government provided buildings and funds, they must also have had power over missionaries' methods and attitudes. Although Haury's priority was to bring Jesus to the Arapaho and Cheyenne, his methods were in line with the goal of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to assimilate the Indians. President Grant's peace policy emphasized kindness rather than brutality, but Grant's goal was

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Barrett, 17, 21. See also *Christlicher Bundesbote* (15 January 1883): 15 and *Beilage zum Bundesbote* (January 1883). Cantonment had been built in 1879 to prevent the escape of Northern Cheyenne who had been forced to the south and who wanted to return to their former home in the Black Hills. Haury and his family moved into Cantonment a month after the soldiers left.

[133]Mann, 35.

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Barrett 20. See also Loretta Fowler, "Arapaho," *Handbook of North American Indians* Vol. 13 *Plains*, 850. In fact, the government did give Little Raven the large hospital building because he had seen the White House in Washington and had asked for a mansion for himself, since he also was an important leader. Mann, 72.

to teach Indians "Christian civilization" through the aid of Christian organizations and reformers. These well-intentioned organizations and reformers decided that Indian communities should not be tribal entities but should be absorbed into the American mainstream. Indians were to become individualized and Americanized citizens.[135] Thus Mennonite missionaries worked toward the realization of government goals.

Haury's plans for a colony did not materialize. In 1887 the Dawes Act, also called the General Allotment Act, was passed. This Act gave 160 acres of reservation lands to the head of each Native family for private ownership, leaving many acres free for white settlers. In Indian Territory, the result of the Dawes Act was the 1891 Oklahoma Land Rush. Some Mennonites, even some missionaries, actually benefitted from the land rush, although the government did not give as many acres to Mennonite schools as they had hoped.[136] The Cheyenne and Arapaho were the losers. Before the land rush, their reservation had consisted of four million acres and after it was over, they were left with 528,652.94 acres, approximately one eighth of what they had before.[137]

Mennonites justified their land claims since they thought that Plains Indians were inferior because they had not made good use of the ground. The editor of the *Christlicher Bundesbote* in 1893 wrote that Indians were decreasing in number because they had not cultivated the rich land. They had been negligent so they were not to be pitied. Fortunately,

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[135]See Prucha, v, 30-31.

[136]Mann, 82.

[137]
Trenholm, 279. Money from the sale of the land was not paid directly to the Cheyenne and Arapaho. Rather it was placed on credit for their schools, agencies, military needs, and missions.

Europeans were bringing the blessings of their culture and the Gospel to the Indians.[138] This editorial illustrates that Mennonites, like other Euroamericans, saw land as a potential commodity to be used and "improved" for material progress. In contrast, Native peoples viewed land, and the animals on that land, as a resource that must not be pillaged through excessive development or waste.[139] The editor's view was that because Euroamericans would make "better" use of the land, they had the right to take it. That is likely why Mennonites felt no guilt about staking claims during the Oklahoma land rush.

From the Arapaho and Cheyenne perspective, an economic barrier existed between them and the Mennonites. While they were losing the prosperity they had enjoyed when they were hunting in their homeland, Mennonites were becoming wealthy as they worked the land that they had recently acquired. Mennonites were prospering because they were industrious and they thought Indians were poor because they were lazy. According to Mennonites, hunting was not real work because agriculture was the acceptable occupation. In their view, hunting was inferior to farming, and hunters were pagan and indolent.[140] Haury reported to his board that when the Arapaho moved to Cantonment, it would be "a beginning to permanent living and to learning how to work" for them.[141]

The Dawes Act dispersed the Indians, making it more difficult for missionaries to continue their religious and educational programs in a centralized location. Even more

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[138]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (3 August 1893): 1.

[139]
Ronald Niezen, *Spirit Wars; Native North American Religions in the Age of Nation Building* (University of California Press, 2000), 151-152.

[140]Mann, 78.

[141]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (July 1883): 103.

detrimental to missions was the government's withdrawal of financial support from church run schools and the establishment of federally run public schools. In 1885 the government, in light of the religious freedom it was founded on, began to examine its Indian policy with regard to sectarian schools. In 1890, the Board of Indian Commissioners decided that these schools would gradually lose their government funding and be phased out. As a result, the four Mennonite residential schools were forced to close between 1896 and 1901.[142]

Haury's Attitudes

At a Mennonite mission conference in Pennsylvania, the speaker described the savage and wild habits and characteristics of American Indians. However, he demonstrated by reading letters from Indian children at Carlisle that in spite of their wild heathendom, they could be converted.[143] Similarly, Haury viewed Native peoples as heathen but redeemable. Initially, Haury had confidence that Christianity would be victorious over "heathenism." While he was at medical school in 1876-1877, Haury wrote seven letters that were published in *Der Mennonitische Friedensbote*[144] and later in booklet form. The letters emphasized that missionaries would be martyrs and pilgrims yet, inconsistently, they also had a triumphalist and apocalyptic tone. Mennonites must be obedient to the Great Commission and must preach

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The four schools were Halstead, Darlington, Cantonment, and Seger Colony. See Mann, 79, 82-83.

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The Mennonite (December 1886): 40. Mennonites missionaries in Indian Territory sent Native students to Pratt's Carlisle School in Pennsylvania. In 1886, Pratt came to the Mennonite schools to recruit students. Haury accompanied 42 Arapaho and Cheyenne girls and boys to Carlisle. See *The Mennonite* (January 1887): 58.

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Der Mennonitische Friedensbote was an early Mennonite publication that merged with other small papers in January 1882 to become *Der Bundesbote*. Harold S. Bender, "*Mennonitische Friedensbote*," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. III: 646.

the Gospel to every nation. Only then could Christ return to establish his kingdom, and be victorious over the evil in this world.[145] In spite of allusions to suffering, Haury's vision of missions was optimistic.

Ten years later a more experienced Haury was less certain of immediate success. He observed that the longer he was a missionary the more uncertain he became that he was equal to the task.[146] In 1887, not long before Haury resigned, he reported that there had been no "extraordinary victories for God among our Indians." They did not hunger for the Bible, and they did not long for salvation. Haury realized that being a missionary to Native peoples was "one of the most difficult and least promising works."[147] The Arapaho and Cheyenne had not quickly accepted the Gospel message. Mennonite missionaries would have to win their respect before they became Christians. To win respect, missionaries would have to demonstrate through daily life what it meant to be a follower of Christ. Haury's triumphalism had changed to dogged determination.

Haury did not spend much time in language study or in trying to understand religious rites and myths because he viewed the Cheyenne and Arapaho's rituals as heathenish, foolish, and useless.[148] He objected to "medicine feasts," as he called their celebrations,[149] and he

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[145]Adrian, 65, 68.

[146]*Beilage zum Christlicher Bundesbote* (January 1883).

[147]*The Mennonite* (7 April 1887): 104.

[148]*The Mennonite* (January 1887): 58. *Christlicher Bundesbote* (July 1883): 103.

[149]*The Mennonite* (November 1886): 26; (January 1887): 58.

stated explicitly that Christianity was exclusive and to accept it meant that traditional religions must collapse.[150]

Henry R. Voth

H.R. Voth's background was quite different from Haury's. Voth was a Dutch Russian. In his autobiography written in retirement, Voth stated that he was born in 1855 to poor German-speaking Mennonite parents in the village of Alexanderwohl, Molotschna, South Russia. His father farmed leased land while supplementing the family income by building wagons and furniture. When Voth was nine, his father became a landowner and the family's financial situation improved. In 1874, the Voth family with the whole Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church immigrated to Kansas because the Russian government threatened to withdraw the Mennonites' privilege to abstain from military service.

Voth remembered himself as a bright child, an eager student. The English he had learned from books in Russia was useful in Kansas where he served as an interpreter for Mennonite immigrants when they purchased necessities they needed to settle in a new land. Eventually, he got a job as a storekeeper's helper, where he continued to improve his English.

The Alexanderwohl Church joined the General Conference soon after they arrived in Kansas because they were interested in and supportive of missions. In Russia, Voth had read missions periodicals and tracts and attended missions meetings and consequently felt God's call to be a missionary. In the United States, he had chances to become a businessman or a public school teacher but he chose to prepare for mission work. In 1877, he began studies at Wadsworth Seminary in Ohio. After graduating, Voth attended a non-Mennonite theological

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Beilage zum Christlicher Bundesbote (January 1883). See also *Christlicher Bundesbote* (July 1883): 103.

seminary and took a short medical course. In 1886, he and his wife, Barbara Baer Voth, began mission work among the Cheyenne and Arapaho in Indian Territory. From 1893 to 1902, he and his second wife, Martha Moser Voth (Barbara had died), were missionaries to the Hopi in Oraibi, Arizona.[151]

Voth's Methods

In Indian Territory Voth's methods were much like Haury's, since he reported to Haury who was superintendent of both the Darlington and Cantonment schools.[152] However, in Arizona his methods changed. He began to study the Hopi language immediately because he thought knowledge of the vocabulary would help him understand Hopi religion. The language seemed impoverished to him, less complete than the Arapaho and Cheyenne languages.[153] He thought it lacked adequate expressions for abstract and spiritual concepts and had no words for God, faith, righteousness, sin, or grace. Voth wondered how the Hopi people, "bound in Satan's chains," would ever grasp these concepts.[154] Yet in 1923, when Voth was no longer living among the Hopi, he wrote in his recollections of Hopi ceremonies,

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John F. Schmidt, "Heinrich R. Voth (1855-1931)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 40.3 (1966): 217-226. Schmidt wrote a short introduction only. The remainder of the article is by Voth, though Schmidt may have translated or edited it. See also John F. Schmidt, "Voth, Henry R.," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. IV: 858-859.

[152]Mann, 73.

153

Missionaries often thought Native languages would be simple and easy to learn but discovered that they were more complex than they had thought. For example, John Kilbuck, missionary to the Yup'ik in Alaska thought the language would be easy to learn but found that their mode of expressing thoughts was difficult. Fienup-Riordan, 30-31.

154

Christlicher Bundesbote (14 September 1893): 4-5. *Christlicher Bundesbote* (7 December 1893): 1.

myths, and language: "What a pantheon, what a religious system, what a rich language, what tradition, what organization!"[155]

Voth was strangely drawn to archeology and anthropology. The Hopi gave him the name "Kikahaumta (One Who Digs among Old Ruins)." Waters called him "a psychological puzzle, an enigmatic paradox to Hopis and whites alike" who, while retaining missionary goals, was inordinately drawn to "ferreting out the secrets of Hopi ceremonialism."[156] In order to learn about Hopi religion, Voth spent many hours in Hopi kivas (underground meeting places for secret societies), observing their rituals, taking notes and sketching diagrams of their religious artifacts. He also took many photographs, both of ceremonies in the plaza and in the kivas.[157] According to Voth, the priests gradually opened their kivas to him because he helped them when they were sick or needed dental work and because he "did not mock and sneer at their religion and kick their sacred objects with [his] feet as one of the early missionaries of another denomination [was] said to have done."[158]

To learn about Hopi ceremonies in the kivas, Voth often got up at three in the morning in order not to miss anything of importance. The atmosphere in the underground kivas was

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H.R. Voth, "Historical Notes of the First Decade of the Mennonite Mission Work Among the Hopi of Arizona." In James, 153-154.

156 Waters, 355-356.

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Waters includes photographs "from a collection of hundreds of negatives" taken by Voth in his history of the Hopi. Waters comments that "photographic plates of that time were wholly inadequate for action pictures and for scenes in dim light, such as the interiors of the kivas." However, it is believed that Voth was the only person who ever took photographs inside kivas and Waters says they "have a remarkable sense of authenticity." Waters, 199.

158

H.R. Voth, "Historical Notes of the First Decade of the Mennonite Mission Work Among the Hopi of Arizona," In James, 153. The Owakoel Order was a ceremony performed by women's societies at the end of the annual ceremonial cycle, signifying fruition. Waters, 283.

stale and unpleasant because the members stayed in the kivas day and night and because they were heated with firewood and were full of smoke, yet Voth endured and persisted. He engaged in animated discussions with the Hopi during the early hours of the day. On one occasion, he participated in a nine-day ceremony that ended with a procession between four and five in the morning. In this procession were the Chief Priestess of the Owakoel Order, the helper priest, the Chief Priest, and Voth. They emerged from the kiva and walked quietly in single file until Voth asked where they were going. The Chief Priest told him they were bringing an offering to the morning star and the rising sun and asked if Mennonites did likewise. Voth then told the Chief Priest about the Creator (the Christian God) of the morning star and the sun.[159]

In winter, when the men spun, wove, knitted, and sewed in their kivas, Voth held meetings with them in their own language. He found their responses different from his previous Arapaho audiences. The Arapahos listened quietly, but the Hopi asked questions, made objections, expressed doubts, and sometimes opposed his teachings. One thoughtful man said he could not believe that the earth turned or that the dead would rise again. Voth then explained the resurrection in terms of a seed that was planted and died and rose in a new form, an example that the Hopi understood well from their own ceremonies and agricultural way of life.[160] None of these encounters between Voth and the Hopi, however, involved real discussion, on a level playing field. Voth consistently took the role of teacher rather than the

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[159]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (20 February 1896): 1.

[160]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (26 March 1896): 1. This example reminded the Hopi of their own bean stalk ceremony which secured them against crop failure. Talayesva, 196. Voth used *Anknuepfungspunkte* in these situations. More will be said about this on page 67.

role of listener. Yet he was making use of examples, as a teaching method, that could help to bridge the cultural gap.

With regard to gender roles, Voth also asserted dominance. He did not accept the Hopi division of labor.[161] That men sewed and wove and women owned houses and crops seemed inappropriate to him. He called their practices a peculiarity. His wife and daughter, with Voth's help, made a concerted effort to teach the women to sew until they actually created their own clothes. Voth reported that at first the women laughed at this "new arrangement" and the men remarked that women could not sew because they understood nothing. When the women actually finished making some clothes for themselves, the men wanted to know if the Voths would pay them for the sewing they had done.[162] Thus the Hopi failed to comprehend that Voth was trying to teach them to pattern their gender roles according to Mennonite practice. Both Haury and Voth thought the Mennonite nuclear family and division of labor were the ideal, so they tried to persuade the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi to adopt these life ways.

Voth put his energies into learning the Hopi language, myths, and rituals. Whereas Haury's priorities were in beginning schools to educate children in the Mennonite way of life, Voth's goal was to reach adults by understanding their traditional religion. Voth's methods were different partly because the government was taking over responsibility for Hopi schools and was no longer financially supporting Mennonite schools. But Mennonite missionaries

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[161] The Hopi are matrilineal and matrilocal. Women owned the land and produce, while men were responsible for religious ceremonies. When a man married, he moved in with his wife's parents and worked for them. Waters, 15; Talayesva, 222.

[162] *Christlicher Bundesbote* (22 March 1894): 1; (3 November 1898): 1.

were also beginning to realize that their efforts to reach adults through children had failed and were turning their attention toward reaching adult Indians.

Voth's Attitudes

Voth was concerned for Native peoples because he thought of them as a race nearing extinction. His view was that because the Cheyenne and Arapaho were decreasing in number, the missionary's task was urgent. Voth wrote to a Mennonite minister in Pennsylvania that many tribes were "waiting for the bread of life and for missionaries to hand it to them."[163] This letter shows that Voth, like others of his time, thought Indians were becoming extinct, and that those who were left would quickly leave their traditional religions and become Christians. Voth thought the Mennonite constituency was responsible to make personnel and money available before these tribes died out. Doubtless his belief that the Hopi tribe would soon be extinct lent impetus to Voth's archeological and anthropological endeavors as well.

Voth's initial attitude toward the Hopi in 1893 was that they were primitive, but more intelligent than the Cheyenne and Arapaho. The Hopi were settled, industrious farmers in contrast with nomadic Indians.[164] Like Mennonites, the Hopi were peaceful, frugal, and supported themselves through their trades. Above all, they seemed malleable, which meant that they would accept Christianity quickly.[165] By 1898 Voth's attitude had changed. Other Indians, reported Voth, had some pride but not the Hopi. They were without self respect or ambition and they were unreliable liars. They were physically dirty and spiritually decayed

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[163]*The Mennonite* (July 1887): 154.

[164]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (9 February 1893): 1.

[165]
Christlicher Bundesbote (9 February 1893): 1. See also *Christlicher Bundesbote* (2 March 1893): 1.

and ruined. After five years with the Hopi, Voth concluded that they were not as malleable as he at first had thought, and they were even more resistant to the Gospel than the Arapaho and Cheyenne.[166]

In fact, Voth thought the Hopi were "thoroughly heathen." Although he felt that scenes in the Hopi midsummer rite were deeply moving, he described the Snake Dance as a horrible naked drama.[167] Voth wrote that many tourists came from far and wide to see the Snake Dance because they were curious about this "gruesome drama of poisonous snakes performed by the fanatical heathen." He thought the Hopi were like children who needed rules, so he wondered whether he should ask the Bureau of Indian Affairs to "discover the facts" about the Snake Dance and to forbid it as they had done with other Indian ceremonies that were degrading and obscene. The editor of the *Bundesbote* agreed. If the government did not take responsibility to stop the Snake Dance, the Mission Board should do so.[168]

Voth was skeptical about the validity of Hopi oral stories. To illustrate, a Hopi Chief Priest told Voth that he would believe in Jesus if he appeared to him personally. When Voth asked whether he had seen the Hopi gods, the priest admitted that he had not but he believed in them since oral traditions told him about these gods. Voth replied that Christian stories had

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Christlicher Bundesbote (14 April 1898): 1. The editor observes the "Moki" are deeply sunken in darkness but although there seem to be no *Anhalts* or *Anknuepfungspunkte* left, yet God can break through the darkness and bring success even in the most difficult situations.

167

Christlicher Bundesbote (11 January 1894): 1. The three major summer ceremonies were the Niman Kachina, the Flute Ceremony, and the Snake-Antelope Ceremony. In the Snake Dance, the Hopi danced with live rattlesnakes in their mouths. If the ceremony was performed correctly, the Hopi believed that it would bring rain. Waters, 242-281.

168

Christlicher Bundesbote (3 February 1898): 1. *Christlicher Bundesbote* (15 September 1898): 1.

been written down and thus they were true.[169] Interestingly, Voth equated written history with truth and oral history with fiction. He expected the Hopi priest to follow the argument to its logical conclusion and to acknowledge the superiority of Christianity because it was documented.

The Hopi perspective on Voth's activities in Oraibi is different from his reports to the Mennonite constituency. Leo Simmons, a Yale sociologist, interviewed the Hopi Don Talayesva in 1938. Talayesva remembered praying for oranges and candy because Voth told the Hopi children that Jesus was the Good Shepherd and if they would become sheep instead of goats, Jesus would give them anything they asked for.[170] As a ten-year old boy, Talayesva exchanged a good bow, given to him by his ceremonial father, for some of Voth's candy, crackers, and calico. Later he regretted what he had done.[171] Talayesva also remembered that Voth forced his way into the kivas. He "wore shoes with solid soles and when the Hopi tried to put him out of the kiva he would kick them"[172] (perhaps while he was coming down the ladder.) In 1933 Mischa Titiev's Hopi informant, Ned, recalled that when Voth came into the kiva, a Hopi warrior picked him up bodily and carried him up the ladder and out. However,

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[169]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (2 June 1898): 1.

[170]Talayesva, 41.

[171]

Talayesva, 100. Don's father was very poor. Exchanges such as this must have been one way in which Voth acquired Hopi artifacts.

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Talayesva, 252. Don Talayesva was born in 1890 in Oraibi. He was a child when Voth was at Oraibi. Talayesva lived a traditional Hopi life in Oraibi society until age ten. Then he attended an American school, where he accepted a "white" life-style. After he was twenty he chose to go back to living as a Hopi. He was influenced by and torn between two contrasting cultures.

when Voth came right back down again, the priests let him stay provided he sat near the ladder.[173]

Talayesva harbored a great deal of resentment toward Voth for stealing and publishing the secrets of the Soyal and Powama ceremonies. When Simmons asked him for descriptions of these ceremonies, Talayesva refused to talk about them because he believed that crops would fail if secrets were revealed. When Simmons brought out a book, published by Voth and Dorsey with pictures and drawings of altars, Talayesva said: "That guy Voth was clever."[174] He called Voth a wicked man and accused him of breaking his own God's commandments when he stole Hopi images, thus becoming a thief and an idolator.[175] In 1912, the Hopi still blamed their crop failures on Voth because he had offended their gods by publishing their secrets.[176]

Another Hopi, Polingaysi Qoyawayma, was a young girl when Voth was at Oraibi. According to Qoyawayma, Voth's "deep interest in the Hopi nation and their cultural background had won him national distinction in archeological and anthropological circles, as well as the hatred of many of the more conservative Hopis."[177]

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[173]Titiev, 361.

[174]Talayesva, 6-7. See Waters 188-213 for descriptions of the Soyal and Powama ceremonies. The Soyal was a winter solstice ceremony that had to do with the sun god and fertility. The Powama was the Hopi initiation ceremony.

[175]Talayesva, 252.

[176]Talayesva, 252.

[177]Qoyawayma, 78.

Rodolphe Petter

Rodolphe Petter's background was very different from Haury's and Voth's, although they were all well-educated. Petter was born in Switzerland in 1865 to a non-Mennonite family. Through the influence of a friend, he joined the Mennonite church. While he was still a teenager, his brother had a dream in which he saw Petter talking to Indians. To Petter, this dream indicated that he should become a missionary. His call to missions was confirmed at a mission festival. Petter received his missionary training at the Basel Mission Institute from 1883 to 1889 where he also learned the German language. In 1890, he and his wife Marie Gerber Petter immigrated to the United States and attended Oberlin Theological Seminary in Ohio where they learned the English language. He was a missionary to the Southern Cheyenne in Indian Territory from 1891 to 1916 and to the Northern Cheyenne in Montana from 1916 to 1947.[178] After his wife, Marie, died, Petter married Bertha Kinsinger, a fellow missionary to the Cheyenne. Petter was a talented linguist who created a Cheyenne dictionary and grammar and translated the New Testament, parts of the Old Testament, and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into the Cheyenne language.[179]

Petter's Methods

Petter's methods were different from those of Haury and Voth. Haury concentrated on children, whereas Voth focused on learning to understand and convert adults through studying

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A Mennonite mission to the Northern Cheyenne began at Lame Deer, Montana in 1904. The first missionary was G.A. Lindscheid.

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See Cornelius Krahn, "Petter, Rodolphe Charles" in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. IV: 155-156. See also Rodolphe Petter, "Some Reminiscences of Past Years in my Mission Service Among the Cheyenne," in *The Mennonite* (10 November, 1936): 1-18. Basel and Oberlin were non-Mennonite schools that were popular with Mennonite students.

and displacing their religious rituals. Petter stressed language as the way to reach the Cheyenne. Being a linguist, Petter was convinced that the way to convert the Cheyenne was to give them the Bible in their own language. He hired Harvey Whiteshield, an educated Cheyenne, to help him collect and translate Cheyenne literature and legends. This body of oral history helped Petter to understand the thought and life of the Cheyenne. He compared the Cheyenne language to a complicated machine made up of expressions that were like big screws, little screws, big wheels, and little wheels. He was surprised at the wealth of expressions that existed, expressions that could be understood only when they were put into the context of the whole Cheyenne oral history.[180]

Petter studied Cheyenne oral history in order to find terms for spiritual concepts that he could use in his translation of biblical terms. His English-Cheyenne Dictionary and his Cheyenne Grammar are still used as sources by scholars.[181] He deplored the fact that many young educated Cheyenne were already speaking only English while he was diligently working at his translations, commenting that "the younger Cheyenne generation in learning English seem[ed] to have lost the ingenuity of the older Indians in their unique way of expressing themselves."[182] Like Voth, Petter was interested in creation and other myths and distrusted oral history. He said it did not really matter whether oral history was actually true. True or false, knowledge of myths helped him to learn the terms for Cheyenne religious thought.[183]

Petter believed that Native peoples needed to become Christians before they became

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[180]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (16 March 1893): 1.

[181]See the bibliography of the *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, *Plains*.

[182]Barrett, 29, 30.

[183]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (16 March 1893): 1.

"civilized." He asked: "What does it help the Indian if he can farm if he remains a heathen?" Although he was glad to give advice on farming, his priority was to spread the Gospel, not to do manual work. Petter recognized the physical needs of the Cheyenne but he believed that they must change from the inside before their lot could improve.[184] The Mennonite constituency agreed. An excerpt from a presentation on New Year's Eve, 1893, at Mountridge, Kansas by someone called "H" made this clear. The excerpt read:

> The spread of Christianity is the main factor in civilizing the nations. Mission is the true civilizing factor of all humankind. Jesus did not come into the world to bring civilization but to save the lost. We do not do missions to bring civilization but to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus. People do not come to peace by becoming civilized but civilization comes as a result of becoming Christian. Civilization is the development or evolution of people in both the physical and spiritual sense. Being a Christian is connected to learning to work, to building proper homes, to education.[185]

Petter's Attitudes

In Petter's opinion, Cheyenne legends were a field of sorcery and superstition. Fantasies, fables, dreams, spirits, devils, and truth were skillfully mixed in a horrifying yet laughable way.[186] Yet he acknowledged that the Cheyenne were a deeply religious people and he took time to study their myths, dances, and ceremonies in an effort to understand them. He observed that the Cheyenne demonstrated "more zeal and self-sacrifice in the service of the devil than many Christians showed in the service of God." However since their gods were not helping the Cheyenne and they were still hungry, cold, and sick, Petter thought that they would become dissatisfied and turn to Christianity.[187] Petter demonstrated the Mennonite triumphalist

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[184]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (18 April 1895): 1; (23 May 1895): 1.

[185]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (1 March 1894): 1.

[186]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (16 March 1893): 1.

[187]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (15 February 1894): 1.

attitude that "heathenism" could be overcome. After attending a Sun Dance in 1886 where he observed how naked and cold they were he commented: "The heathen rage, the Lord is victorious! The task is yours, Lord Jesus Christ...and because it is your task, it cannot fail."[188]

Native resistance to Christianity changed Petter's views about easy conversions. For example, a Cheyenne priest told Petter that the Great Spirit had given the Indians a different skin colour, religion, and customs. Just as they could not change the colour of their skin, they should not change their religion and customs. When Petter asked the priest whether the Great Spirit could change their skin colour, the priest answered that he could. Petter responded that God could also change their hearts, but the priest spat on the ground and left unconvinced.[189] Yet all Indians, thought Petter, were spiritually thirsty as evidenced by their outer signs of offerings, prayers, and dances. Petter acknowledged that visible results came slowly, although he believed the "field" was "white unto harvest."[190]

Petter was frustrated by two non-Native scholars who were having an adverse effect on the beliefs of young educated Arapaho and Cheyenne by justifying Native "superstitious ideas." White settlers were also having a negative influence by robbing the Natives and introducing their own sins and vices. Other denominations were confusing them with their different theological emphases. Under such conditions, new Christians could hardly survive and Petter's initial optimism was sorely tried.[191]

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[188]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (10 September 1896): 1.

[189]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (9 September 1897): 1.

[190]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (5 January 1898): 1.

[191]*The Mennonite* (11 February 1904): 5. The "two professedly learned men" are not named.

Syncretism

The Oxford English Dictionary defines syncretism as an "attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices, especially in philosophy or religion." George Calixtin (1586-1656) a German Lutheran professor of theology, is credited with beginning a school of thought that endorsed the concept of syncretism which "aimed at harmonizing the sects of Protestants and ultimately all Christian bodies." The term was almost always used "in a derogatory sense."[192] In Germany in the late nineteenth century, it was referred to as *Mischerei*, or a mishmash of religions, distinguished from *Mischung*, a blending of religions. Syncretism was regarded "as an unprincipled abandonment of the faith of the Fathers."[193]

Antonio Gualtieri, Professor of Religious Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, defines syncretism as "a process entailing the fusion of two religious systems, producing a new tradition, integrating elements of both, but...identified with neither."[194] In 1971, Gualtieri interviewed sixteen Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal missionaries in the Canadian Northwest Territories. They thought northern peoples had no religion before contact with Christianity, so there was nothing to fuse with. In contrast, Mennonite missionaries acknowledged strong vibrant religious systems among the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi, though they attributed traditional religions to Satan.

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[192]http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50245315. Accessed on 8 November 2005.

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"Syncretism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd. ed., Vol. 13 (Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 8926.

[194]

Antonio R. Gualtieri, *Christianity and Native Traditions: Indigenization and Syncretism Among the Inuit and Dene of the Western Arctic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Cross Cultural Publications, Inc., 1984), 93.

Haury's records do not mention anything about syncretism, so perhaps he was not even familiar with the concept. He came to aboriginal peoples in 1880 before they had had enough contact with Christianity to express their religion in syncretic terms. When he first arrived at Darlington, Haury was convinced that the Arapaho religious practices were "a kind of response to God's claim upon them." But when he saw the Arapaho Sun Dance he called it "heathen superstition in which this people is held and guided by Satan."[195] In the mid 1880s, Captain Jesse M. Lee, Indian Commissioner, reported that the Cheyenne and Arapaho were faithfully attending religious services while "simultaneously holding to their own ways of life...especially to the sacred ceremonies."[196]

In the 1890s two revitalization movements, the Ghost Dance and the Peyote Road, spread into Indian Territory. The Ghost Dance came east when a young, educated Arapaho from Indian Territory went to Nevada in 1891 to learn the teachings of a Paiute named Wovoka (also called Jack Wilson), the founder of the movement. Wovoka, who thought he was a prophet like Jesus, said that in a vision he had been taken into a heaven full of game where he saw the people who had died, now happy and young. God told him that people were to live peacefully and to learn a dance that would bring back life as it had been before European contact.[197] The Arapaho, and to a lesser extent the Cheyenne, followed Wovoka's

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[195]In Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 9.

[196]Mann, 77.

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Alice Beck Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1989), 5-7.

teachings as a religious response to their loss of lands, economic resources, and political autonomy that threatened their languages, customs, and beliefs.[198]

The Ghost Dance was an example of syncretism since Wovoka incorporated elements of Christianity, such as Jesus, heaven, and the resurrection into traditional religion. H.P. Krehbiel, in his history written in 1898, described the Ghost Dance as follows:

> That the influences of Christianity and civilization have not remained without effect upon the Indian, is shown by a unique religious movement which made its appearance among them in the early nineties. Reference is had to the 'Messiah Craze' which spread among all Indians from Canada to the far south. This craze was caused by a strange mixture of gospel truths and pagan superstitions, and gained its power with the Indians from one of its leading doctrines, which was that a messiah would soon appear who would destroy the whites and restore to the Indian his hunting grounds and buffalo herds.[199]

Voth and Petter were in Indian Territory in the 1890s and their reactions to the Ghost Dance indicated their respective attitudes toward syncretism. Voth recognized an opportunity to create a link between Christianity and this new religion, so in the spring of 1891 he met with Sitting Bull, an Arapaho Ghost Dance leader (not to be confused with the Sioux leader Sitting Bull) to see if their visions for the future could connect. Voth's vision was that the Arapahos' conversion to Christianity would bring them "civilization," while Sitting Bull's vision was that the Arapahos' return to traditional religion would restore the buffalo. Though they took time to dialogue, apparently they found the gap between their visions too wide to bridge.[200] Yet

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198

Trenholm observed that missionary alignment with the oppressive government may explain why the Arapaho and Cheyenne chose their own expressions of worship such as the Ghost Dance and the Peyote ritual rather than Christianity, the religion of white men. 266-267.

[199]Krehbiel, Vol. I , 318-319.

[200]Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War,* 136-138. See also Barrett 58.

Voth saw in the Ghost Dance an opportunity to make a connection and actually listened to an Arapaho in equal exchange.

Petter saw the Ghost Dance when he first came to Indian Territory in 1891. In 1936, he wrote in hindsight:

> ...there on the prairie, in the dark night, we saw for the first time the red men astir with their frenzied hope of a deliverer; heard the beating of their drums, their howling and singing, and beheld them dancing in a large circle in the center of which a fire was kept burning bright.[201]

This first contact impressed Petter with the Indian's great spiritual need. He did not make connections between the Ghost Dance and Christianity as Voth tried to do, although he acknowledged that the Cheyenne were looking for an "Indian Saviour." He believed that if the Gospel had been available in the Cheyenne language in 1891, they would have accepted Christianity because they were tired of their "heathenism" and were looking for something better, hence their acceptance of the Ghost Dance, not traditionally a part of their religious system.[202]

The Peyote Way was another form of syncretism. The Peyote cult began in Mexico and was introduced to the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho around 1884.[203] Peyote was a cactus-like herb with a carrot-shaped root and a button-shaped crown. The followers of the Peyote Way used the crown as a sacrament at their meetings, much as Catholics and Protestants used bread and wine at their masses or communions, as an intermediary between

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[201]Petter, Reminiscences.

[202]Petter, Reminiscences, 3. The Ghost Dance gradually died out after the Battle of Wounded Knee in Pine Ridge, South Dakota in the winter of 1890.

[203]Likely the Peyote Way was not prevalent among the Arapaho and Cheyenne until the 1890s since Haury and Voth did not comment about it.

them and the Creator. The large peyote button, which took a central position on a bed of sage, had a picture of Jesus painted on it and was offered as a supplication to God.[204] Some missionaries confused the peyote button with the mescal bean which was more intoxicating. Petter thought that peyote's narcotic effect, which was "held as religious revelation," darkened the hearts and minds of the participants. He called the Peyote Way a "mongrel or a monster in religious aberration," brought to the Cheyenne by Satan himself.[205]

The Hopi were not involved in the Ghost Dance or the Native American Church, but there was other evidence of syncretism. Polingaysi Qoyawayma remembered that as a Hopi child she prayed to Father Sun and sang "Jesus Loves Me." She "mixed religions as confidently as she mixed Hopi parched corn and the Bahana's hard candy."[206] As a young adult, Qoyawayma went to the Mennonite Bethel College in Kansas, where she was called Elizabeth Q. White. When she returned to her home, she felt torn and unhappy because she could not agree that "all things Hopi were wrong and that the missionaries' approach to the problem of religion was one hundred percent right." She solved the problem by blending the best of Hopi religion with Christianity. Consequently the Hopi called her a two-heart and Christians called her an idol worshiper.[207]

Although Voth was wary of syncretism, he searched for *Anknuepfungspunkte* (connecting points) between Hopi traditional religion and Christianity, as the Apostle Paul did

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[204]Trenholm, 296, 300.

[205]Petter, Reminiscences.

[206]Quoyawayma, 14-17. The Bahana was the white Messiah for whom the Hopi had waited many years.

[207]Qoyawayma, 105, 122-127.

at Athens when he explained the Greek's Unknown God to them.[208] Voth began to realize that when the Hopi priests smoked in their kivas, they were sending up prayer offerings. He also found connections between the Hopi Snake Order and the story in the Old Testament where Moses' rod became a snake. To Voth, the Hopi Snake Dance was not unique since it had played an important role among the Phoenicians, the Hindus, the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, and the Egyptians as well as other North and South American tribes. Thus Voth was able to make connections which seemed to qualify his goal to destroy traditional religion. Yet Voth, like other Protestant missionaries, did not favour melding Christianity with Hopi religion.[209] Although he realized that snake dances were a part of the cultural rites of other peoples, he said the dance was "a small piece of the night of heathendom" that was binding the Hopi. He felt that his task was to tear down the "bulwarks in which the Hopi were entrenched" and to "pull out the worst weeds so that the good seed of the Gospel could take root and grow."[210]

Often Voth used his knowledge to point out differences rather than commonalities between Hopi religion and Christianity. His mission on the mesa was characterized more by, in his words, *Niederreiszungs-Unterminierungs-Maulwurfsarbeit* (demolishing, undermining,

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Christlicher Bundesbote (26 March 1896): 1. For Paul at Athens, see Acts 17:22-28. The explanation of the creator God he gave while participating in the procession that brought offerings to the morning star and rising sun was such an *Anknuepfungspunkt.* See dissertation page 54.

209

Myra Rutherdale finds that Anglican missionaries opposed syncretism before World War II. She observes that "most [missionaries] argued instead that more work had to be done to eradicate all vestiges of the past." Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2002), xxx.

210

For a graphic description of the Snake Dance, see Voth's report in the *Christlicher Bundesbote* (11 January 1894): 1. See also *Christlicher Bundesbote* (26 March 1896): 1.

mole's work) than building upon common understandings. One of the Chief Priests repeatedly told Voth that Christian teachings were similar to the teachings of Hopi ancestors. When Voth pressured him to talk about traditional teachings, he had to admit that they were quite different. Because Voth had become familiar with Hopi myths, songs, ceremonies, and prayers, he could impress his listeners by demonstrating differences, using this tactic to make the Chief Priests look foolish.[211] By 1896, his relationship with the Hopi had deteriorated to the point where Voth thought the Hopi were so sunken in "stupidity, indifference, and deceitfulness" that he could no longer find *anknuepfungspunkte.*[212]

Like Voth, Petter studied Cheyenne myths and legends. However, Petter studied the Cheyenne language to find *anhaltspunkte*. *Anhaltspunkte* (Petter's term) are reference points to stop at, rather than *anknuepfungspunkte* (Voth's term) that link or tie. Voth's term implies that he tried to make connections between Christianity and traditional religions while Petter wanted to convey spiritual terms correctly in the Cheyenne language. Petter thought that to speak the Cheyenne language allowed him to win the people's trust and to enter into their thought life, their character, their habits, and their religion. Knowing the Cheyenne language gave him *anhaltspunkte*, knowledge to deal with the Cheyenne in a more effective way. He reported:

> Religion is the mother to customs and thought life among the Cheyenne but the natural, the wildness of the unsettled prairies and many other factors have influenced their religion to a great extent and also their character. You cannot just ignore these things and preach to them as you would to civilized people. For them to understand the Gospel, pictures need to be used which are understandable to them. Thus language study is the cornerstone for spiritual work.[213]

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[211]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (3 February 1898): 1.

[212]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (1 October 1896): 1; (25 March 1897): 1.

[213]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (19 March 1896): 1-2.

Petter was less willing than Voth, however, to look for commonalities between Native religions and Christianity. He thought the Cheyenne were dissatisfied with their religion since it was not helping them. Yet he observed that they did not easily commit to Christianity because Indians changed only after much deliberation, especially in religious matters. Petter rejected any connection between Christian truths and Cheyenne religion. He wrote:

> We need to show [the Cheyenne] that their traditional religion is useless. But roots are very deep and it is difficult to convince them that their traditional religion is wrong. Our work is not to graft the new religion into their old religious understanding but they must be rooted in Christ. And how do we do that? Thanks to God he gives us a dissecting knife when he tells us: "The Word of God is powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword, and separates soul and spirit, bone and marrow and is a judge of thoughts of the heart."[214]

When two Cheyenne priests asked for an opportunity to preach in the Mennonite church service, Petter sent them away because although they prayed to the Christian God, they continued to observe their traditional ceremonies at the same time.[215]

Theron Schlabach, in his history of Mennonite missions, points out that Mennonites deliberately chose distant areas to establish missions in order to "avoid contamination from a lower standard of Christianity." He continues, "There was very little room in Mennonite missionary thinking for formulas that might soften new believers' paths by letting the gospel fuse or syncretize with different cultures."[216]

Indigenization

Churches that are self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing are usually thought of as indigenous churches. Yet, Schlabach includes more in the term. Indigenization

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[214]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (23 May 1895): 1.

[215]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (9 June 1898): 1.

[216]Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel,* 149.

is "relating gospel to culture. Its central idea is to make the Christian faith truly at home with–in some sense native to peoples newly accepting it."[217] Thus in order to be indigenous, Native churches should worship God in their own language and music under the leadership of Native pastors.

Although General Conference missionaries encouraged the preservation of Native languages, they were not open to other forms of Native expression. Petter thought Cheyenne music was more like yodeling than like singing so it was unacceptable.[218] He did not allow Christian lyrics to be set to Native music. He felt that "they catch the Indians simply because their tune is like that of the heathen and peyote people."[219] When he translated hymns into the Cheyenne language, he set the words to Mennonite gospel tunes familiar to him. Even from 1916 to 1947, when he worked among the Northern Cheyenne in Montana, Petter thought that Cheyenne traditional melodies represented devil worship.[220] He initiated a summer festival, financed by the Christian Cheyenne, to discuss the Bible. Petter hoped that "some heathen" would come to the festival and that it would "be a beginning on the part of the Christian Indians to do away with and to supersede the heathen gatherings as they are now held."[221] However, there is no indication that this festival incorporated Cheyenne cultural forms.

In Arizona, the Hopi feared and opposed the form of baptism practiced by Mennonites, yet no changes were made to accommodate them. The women fled from the room when the

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[217]Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 195.

[218]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (19 March 1896): 1-2.

[219]Quoted in Barrett, 31.

[220]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (23 May 1895): 1. *Canadian Mennonite* (26 March 2001): 5.

[221]*The Mennonite* (18 August 1904): 1. I have found no further report on this festival.

first Hopi girl was baptized because they were sure they would be injured.[222] The pouring of water, as symbolism of spiritual renewal and resurrection to new life, caused them to fear the wrath of their gods. Moreover, the Hopi felt strongly that water should never be wasted. Most of their ceremonies centered around prayer for rain upon their parched lands. However, the Hopi had no say in what form of baptism would be more acceptable to them.

Voth, and Petter's reports demonstrate that their expectations of Native leaders were, in fact, unrealistic and it is not surprising that the Cheyenne failed to live up to them. Voth feared that potential leaders, Native students who came home from their schools at Carlisle and Halstead, would be drawn back into "the heathenish, sinful life and be lost."[223] Voth's fears became reality when one student, Josiah Kelly, refused to help Voth with language study and translation because he could not stand the rules that Voth imposed upon him. Williamson, another helper and potential leader, ran away with a woman.[224]

Harvey Whiteshield, a young Cheyenne who had studied for six years at Fort Wayne College, Indiana, was a promising candidate for leadership. He did good work helping Petter with his translations. Yet Bertha Kinsinger, a single Mennonite woman who became Petter's wife after the death of his first wife, took Whiteshield's place as Petter's linguistic helper.[225]

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[222]*The Mennonite* (15 September 1904): 1; (22 September 1904): 2.

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Halstead boarding school opened in 1882. Mennonite missionaries sent Cheyenne and Arapaho young people to learn about Christian family life and farming. In the beginning, students went to various homes of farmers and later the school was on Christian Krehbiel's farm. Mann, 71.

[224]*The Mennonite* (January 1887): 58; (7 April 1887): 104.

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Bertha Kinsinger Petter was an example of a female missionary who did not fit into the usual stereotypes of Mennonite women. She graduated with a Master of Arts degree in 1910 from Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio. Before she married Rodolphe Petter, she and her friend

Whiteshield was committed to Christianity and to preaching the Gospel, but he found no opportunities for ministry.[226] Petter criticized Whiteshield because he mixed English with the Cheyenne language, used indigenous lyrics and melodies, and taught the Cheyenne that white people had killed Jesus. Whiteshield also drew a parallel between Jesus hanging on the cross and the Sun Dance, thus displeasing the Mennonite Mission Board.[227]

In 1911, when Petter reported to the General Conference about the work among the Cheyenne, he said:

> And now we come to the Indians, who surely do not belong to the cultured races of the world. These were children of nature in the truest sense of the word, utterly without culture, without history....The fact is plain that our Indian churches in their present condition cannot be left to support and govern themselves. They have not reached the age of maturity, hence, cannot be considered sister churches by our General Conference. For this reason our Indian Churches should be considered foster children, daughters of our conference, for they will remain such for many years.[228]

Petter was never able to accept either Native forms of worship or Native leadership even though his career among the Cheyenne lasted until 1947.

Although Haury, Voth, and Petter's mission work had many negative aspects, they gained some warm supporters. About Petter, a Cheyenne chief said:

Agnes Williams were in charge of the Clinton, Oklahoma mission field from 1907-1909. They "conducted funerals, preached sermons, and led worship services." After Bertha married, she took over the Cantonment mission in 1912-1914 while Rodolphe wrote and printed his *Cheyenne-English Dictionary*. Barrett, 28-29. Bertha Kinsinger Petter illustrates Myra Rutherdale's argument that boundaries of gender roles were sometimes more flexible in the mission field than they were in North American homes or churches. Rutherdale, 50-51.

[226] Berthrong, 89-90. Fort Wayne College was an off-reservation boarding school modeled after Carlisle. Mann, 59.

[227] Dyck, 292. See also Barret, 30-31.

[228] Quoted in Barrett, 30.

> We red people are accustomed, for many winters, to find a fox behind friendly white people. Now here is a man and his wife who are white but there is no fox behind them. Their heart is our heart. They speak our language. They know our customs. They visit our tents and sit at our fires. Our whole Nation knows them and trusts them. They tell us about God so that we will walk a straight road. We find this very good. They became ill; our people thought they would die. Nobody was happy, we were all very sad. Now, however, they stand before us and our hearts are happy. Our hearts are open to the father in heaven.[229]

Of course, this speech was filtered through Petter's own words and written with constituency support in mind. Still, the old chief showed true affection for Petter and his wife, whom the Cheyenne revered because they had left their families in Switzerland and crossed the ocean to live with them.

Hopi feelings for Voth were not as affectionate. They felt betrayed when Voth, following his ethnological bent, sold their artifacts to the Field Museum in Chicago and described their secret ceremonies in the *Publications of the Field Columbian Museum*, funded by the Museum's Stanley McCormick Hopi Expedition. Voth's extensive knowledge of Hopi tradition and ritual later became important in preserving Hopi culture since the Hopi themselves consulted Voth's writings when they forgot some of their traditional rites.[230] Even so, conservative Hopi hated Voth for the knowledge he had disseminated about them and for the pressure he applied on the Hopi to give up their ceremonies.[231] More recently, the Hopi have asked to have their "culturally sensitive information repatriated." In 1994 they requested

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[229]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (19 March 1896): 1-2.

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Mischa Titiev was told, in the 1930s, that the new Soyal chief was not familiar with the traditional rites and that he studied Voth's writings to learn about them. Titiev, 301, 342.

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Don Talayesva told his biographer Leo Simmons: "Mr. Voth claimed that our gods were no good....even as a child I was taught that the missionaries had no business condemning our gods and that it might cause droughts and famines." Talayesva, 41.

that the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas should "declare a moratorium on use of materials relating to the Hopi people and their ancestors, including field notes, photographs, and drawings."[232]

In assessing the first American Mennonite General Conference missionaries, it appears that they were opposed to syncretism. They were more open to indigenization, since their goal was to establish independent churches under Native leadership. Yet, they wanted Native pastors to adopt Mennonite ways of worship. General Conference missionaries, during the first fifty years among the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi, were not able to give up control and positions of power in order to let less mature Christians take charge.

H.P. Krehbiel wrote in 1900 that after twenty years of mission among the Arapaho and Cheyenne there were few converts. Nevertheless, he was confident that when "the proper time" came, these peoples would be converted in large numbers, perhaps even as whole tribes.[233] "The time of a bountiful harvest is coming," he asserted. When he wrote his second volume, thirty years later, there had been more converts but not to the extent he had predicted earlier. Yet he wrote: "May we never tire of blowing those trumpets of victory" which caused the "greatest heathen stronghold in Canaan to fall."[234]

From the Mennonite perspective, the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi were resistant to Christianity. However, the Arapaho-Cheyenne historian Henrietta Mann, who tried to see events through the eyes of her ancestor White Buffalo Woman, wrote:

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[232] Michael F. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 14-15, 17.

[233] Krehbiel, Vol. I, 334.

[234] Krehbiel, Vol. II, 361.

> The Red-white men proselytized and used education as the means for Indian students to become Christians, but the fact remained that they did not want to have too many Indians on their church rolls. Consequently, no tribal members were admitted into the church until 1888, when Maggie Leonard, a mixed-blood woman, was baptized.[235]

Mennonites celebrated a great victory when Leonard was baptized, their first real convert after eight years of hard labor. From their point of view, the Arapaho and Cheyenne had been particularly hard to win.[236] Yet, it is interesting to note the very different Arapaho and Cheyenne perspective that Mennonites were resistant to receiving Native church members.

General Conference missionaries in the United States were much like other Protestant missionaries of the time. Their values and outlooks about mission work, heathenism, cultural levels, and land were congruent with wider attitudes. Even though Mennonites thought of themselves as a "separate people," those who were progressive enough to engage in missions emulated and imitated other Protestant missions. Schlabach deplores what he sees as excessive borrowing from wider Protestantism that undercut Mennonite identity and failed to include Mennonite distinctives such as nonconformity, nonresistance, and humility. He is more critical of the assumptions underlying the missionary movement than of the missionaries themselves. The whole progressive branch of the Mennonite church was borrowing from the larger Protestant movement, not only the missionaries.[237] Schlabach comments: "While the innovations brought new vigor to Mennonite life, they also reflected tendencies to think and

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Mann, 79. The "Red-white men" was the Cheyenne-Arapaho name for German speaking Mennonites. Mann, 74.

236See Krehbiel, Vol. I, 311.

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Schlabach, *Gospel*, 13-15. It is important to remember that Schlabach comes from the Swiss Mennonite branch that did not join the General Conference and that his sympathies lean toward conservative Mennonitism.

act according to patterns in the surrounding culture. Such tendencies came especially by way of contact with North America's revivalistic Protestants."[238]

To begin a mission program was a major innovation for Mennonites. Yet during the first twenty years of General Conference missions, they did not innovate in their approaches or attitudes. The first three missionaries varied in their methods according to their aptitudes and interests, but their attitudes remained the same over the years–the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi were inferior "heathen."

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Theron H. Schlabach, "Mennonites Organize for Missions," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 52.2 (1978), 113. See also Barrett 69-70. Barrett notes that non-resistance was seldom part of the gospel message preached to Native peoples, not even to the Hopi who were traditionally a pacifist people.

Chapter 4

Conscientious Objectors and Mennonite Pioneer Mission Beginnings: 1940-1950

In chapter 3, I described the methods and attitudes of three General Conference missionaries in the United States and of their Mission Board and constituency. This chapter turns to another place, organization, and time: the Manitoba Bergthaler church that organized Mennonite Pioneer Mission (MPM) in 1944. Although the General Conference Mennonite Mission and MPM were two different organizations because the Bergthaler had not yet joined the General Conference, they were intrinsically linked. The incentive to begin MPM came from Manitoba, but it was "officially born" at Newton, Kansas where Manitoba Mennonites met with the General Conference Mission Board.[239] This chapter examines the foundations upon which the Manitoba mission was built.

Place: Manitoba

Both Canada and the United States welcomed the first Mennonites who emigrated from Russia in the 1870s, but the American government granted them fewer privileges and freedoms than did the Canadian government. For this reason, most conservative Mennonites settled in Manitoba while many progressives went to the United States. Royden Loewen has argued that the *Kleine Gemeinde*, whose members settled in both United States and Canada "often faced analogous opportunities and restrictions in the two countries" and thus he questions whether all conservatives went to Manitoba and progressives went to Kansas and Nebraska.[240] Loewen writes about the *Kleine Gemeinde*, a small part of the whole Mennonite

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[239] Gerbrandt, 333.

[240] See Royden K. Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 5.

group that immigrated, of whom this may be true. However, in the United States many Mennonites opened themselves to American Protestantism and became acculturated, while those in Manitoba lived in isolated settlements, maintaining their separateness. Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to Manitoba had a tendency to turn inward instead of outward.

The Bergthaler Church

The Mennonite Pioneer Mission had its roots in the eighteen Bergthaler congregations of Manitoba that made up the Bergthaler Church. The Bergthaler colony was established in 1836 in southern Russia as a daughter colony of Chortitza.[241] Because there were no longer enough farms for sons and daughters of growing Mennonite families in Chortitza, the mother colony purchased 30,000 acres of land from the Russian government.[242] One hundred and forty five of Chortitza's landless families moved to this new location which they named Bergthal. While they were in Russia, the Bergthaler group was conservative, having little interest in progress. Education for the children was minimal. Schools buildings were primitive. Teachers were untrained; frequently the village herdsman doubled as the teacher. The curriculum consisted of Bible reading and an elementary primer called the *Lesefibel.* Teaching aids such as pictures were not allowed.[243]

When Mennonites first came to Russia, Catherine the Great granted them, like all other foreign colonists, exemption from military duties and freedom to run their own schools.

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Chortitza was the first Russian Mennonite colony, begun in 1789 when Mennonites first came from Prussia. Molotschna was the second Russian Mennonite colony, begun in 1804. These two colonies were considered the mother colonies.

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Originally, this land had belonged to Count Tolstoi; then the Russian government had reserved it for Jewish settlement but it had not been claimed. See Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 25.

[243]Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 29-30.

However, Mennonites did not understand that these privileges were not eternal rights. When the Russian government initiated military and educational reforms in the 1870s, the Bergthaler feared that their privileges and freedoms were vanishing and felt that the Tsars had broken their promises to them. They left Russia as a group in the 1870s and settled in southern Manitoba where the Canadian government allowed them, together with other Mennonites, to establish the East Reserve (the present Steinbach area). After a few years many families moved to the newly formed West Reserve (Altona area) because the land was more productive there.

When the Bergthaler came to Manitoba, they were allowed to run their own schools. Some of the more progressive Bergthaler began a teacher training school in Gretna (later in Altona) to train their own teachers to teach children in provincially inspected schools. They also cooperated with the government to bring in public schools. These major changes in Bergthaler thought were accelerated through H.H. Ewert who came to Manitoba from Halstead, Kansas in 1891 to run the teacher training school at Gretna. Ewert had been educated in Prussia and the United States and brought with him American General Conference influences. These influences were strengthened by itinerant ministers who came from Minnesota, sent by the General Conference Mennonite Mission Board. Through their teaching, a religious renewal movement took place among the Bergthaler.

The conservative Mennonites, however, wanted their children in Mennonite private schools so they broke away from the more progressive Bergthaler. This group was known as Sommerfelder or Chortitza Mennonites.. The result was that many of the Bergthaler, who had been one of the most conservative group of Mennonites in Russia, became a relatively

progressive group in Manitoba.[244] Although the Bergthaler had a concept of one central church to which they all belonged, they met at local schools. Clusters of schools in proximity to one another grew into local congregations.

In the 1920s, a new wave of Russian Mennonites came to Canada and South America.[245] 1870s Mennonites were often called *Kanadier* while 1920s Mennonites were called *Russlaender*. Relationships between the *Kanadier* and the *Russlaender* were not always easy. *Kanadier* thought of *Russlaender* as "too proud, too aggressive, too enthusiastic about higher education, too anxious to exercise leadership, too ready to compromise with the state, too ready to move to the cities, and too unappreciative of the pioneering done by the *Kanadier*."[246] Generally speaking, the later arrivals were more highly educated than Canadian Mennonites and some of them became church and conference leaders.[247]

The 1920s group had even more reason to remain separate from society than the 1780s group because they had suffered from increasing Russification and the horrors of the Russian Revolution, the Red Army, and bandit raids. Levi Keidel, Jr., an American speaker at the

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Alf Redekopp, director of Mennonite Heritage Centre, has suggested that Mennonites from Molotschna and Chortitza had joined the progressive group of Bergthaler and that the impetus for better education came from these new members. "Mennonite Church diversity: Rosenorters, Bergthalers, Hutterites and Others," *Mennonite Historian* (December 2005): 6. See also Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 78-79.

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The United States had closed its doors to German-speaking Mennonite immigrants after World War I.

[246]Anna Ens, 14.

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There were exceptions. For example David Toews, a leader who negotiated with the Canadian government so that the *Russlaender* were allowed to come to Canada in the 1920s, was a *Kanadier*. Also H.H. Ewert, who came to the United States in the 1870s and to Manitoba in 1891, had a good education and established the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna. However, Toews and Ewert went to the United States before coming to Canada.

1956 MPM conference, who held a fifteen-day series of missionary services in southern Manitoba Mennonite congregations, explained the reasons for earlier Mennonite isolation. His report to the General Conference Board of Missions summarized the history of the 1920s Manitoba Mennonites and gave the rationale for their late involvement with missions thus:

> One can well appreciate the difficulties and hardships endured by the German Mennonites in fleeing communist persecutions and relocating in a strange new land. Their primary aims were necessarily survival, so that a program of missions could hardly have been entertained during their earlier years. The natural tendency of a group who were mutually sharing these hardships would be introversion and the development of a framework of heritage to be understandably endeared and cherished.[248]

Keidel continued his report by describing the changes that were taking place in the 1940s and 50s:

> ...a new generation of enthusiastic youth is moving into the scene....an encouraging renewed interest in the program of evangelism and missions is being evidenced....in urban areas, which had been privileged by more frequent visits by furloughing missionaries, the interest is enthusiastic and vibrant. To varying degrees, according to locality, the focal point of interest is being changed from the local church to the regions beyond. They are refinding the great commission. They are realizing that the church is not an end in itself, but must serve as a channel of blessing to a lost world.[249]

Before the 1940s, Russlaender Mennonites and Kanadier Mennonites who sponsored them were inward rather than outward looking, mindful of their own survival and the preservation of their own Mennonite culture. They were also communitarian, with a different theological

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248 *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (April 1956): 7. Although the purpose of Keidel's report was to inform the General Conference Board of Missions about what was happening with missions in Canada, it was also published in the *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* for the Canadian Mennonite readership.

[249] *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* 12.1 (April 1956): 7-8.

perspective than mission-minded evangelicals. For these reasons, missions to aboriginals began over sixty years later in Manitoba than in the United States.[250]

It was not until 1946 that the Bergthaler sent their first foreign missionary, Anne Penner, to India under the auspices of the General Conference Mission Board in the United States.[251] They were even slower to begin involvement with peoples of other cultures who lived near them. When they established MPM stations they chose locations that were difficult to access. Did they, either deliberately or subconsciously, go to distant reserves so that they could avoid accepting the "other" into their churches? Converts at a distance would not jeopardize the ethnicity of churches in Canada as those near at hand might have done.[252]

Changes in the Mennonite world were similar to changes that were happening to Native peoples in Manitoba as the fur trade declined. Societal pressures were strongly affecting both Mennonites and Natives to change their languages to English. Both Mennonite and Native young people were moving to cities and towns and leaving their traditional occupations for different kinds of work. Both Mennonite and Native young people were

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By the 1940s, Mennonites had settled across the prairie provinces, but Manitoba had the first and major outreach to Native peoples.

[251]See Regehr, 362. See also Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 338 and Anna Ens, 114.

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It could be argued that Mennonites went to remote areas because other denominations were not involved there. Yet, Methodists, Anglicans, and United Church missionaries had been active on these reserves. When I asked Ike Froese why Mennonites went to inaccessible places he answered that their thought was influenced by foreign missions. Mennonite Sunday school teachers and Bible Schools urged young people to go to distant lands while nobody called for mission work near at hand. Pincher Creek, Alberta had, at one time, a local outreach to the Blackfoot but it soon ended. The Roseau Reserve was close to the Bergthaler, but they had no outreach program there. Ike Froese, interview with Alvina Block, 22 March 2002. Henry Neufeld writes that MPM went only to reserves where they were invited and it was the distant reserves that invited them to come. Henry Neufeld to Alvina Block, 14 November 2005.

traveling between the city and their rural homes (reserves) in a new kind of nomadic cycle. These similarities could have made Canadian Mennonites more sympathetic with Native peoples, but there are few indications that congregations were aware of any parallel experiences at the time.[253]

Mennonite Conscientious Objectors and the United Church in the 1940s

Interest in missions developed and increased through experiences of young Mennonite men who served in alternative service during the Second World War. When United Church teachers who taught at northern Indian reserves were called into the army, the United Church hired Mennonites, who were conscientious objectors, to take their places as teachers in northern reserve schools. Some Mennonites did not think highly of northern United Church mission workers. In their opinion, United Church teachers were in the North not for love of the work or of the Indians, but only because they could get no other employment and because they were well paid in northern teaching positions. Consequently, Mennonites thought United Church workers gave the Indians very poor spiritual care.[254]

One of the Mennonite conscientious objectors who later became very important in the work of MPM was Henry Gerbrandt. Gerbrandt was sent to teach Cree children at the Cross Lake reserve in the school year of 1943 to 1944 under the supervision of the United Church. He and his wife Susan, whom he married after his Cross Lake experience, were members of

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[253] Mennonite scholars are beginning to notice historical similarities between the experiences of Canadian Natives and Mennonites. For example, in October 2000 a conference was held at the University of Winnipeg called the "History of Aboriginal-Mennonite Relations Conference." One of its goals was "that the commonalities of these two people might serve as a foundation for common understandings and a stronger partnership." See Royden Loewen, "Foreword," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (2001), 7. Yet most Mennonites do not see similarities between their own experiences and those of Native North Americans.

[254] *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1957): 102.

the Lowe Farm Bergthaler Church. From December of 1945 to 1948, the Gerbrandts worked as MPM missionaries in Mexico. From 1950 to 1966, Gerbrandt was the secretary and Field Director of MPM, having a major influence on the mission and its missionaries.

Teachers on Indian reserves in northern Manitoba worked for the federal government. During the war years, the federal Department of Education was short of qualified teachers, so not all those who were sent to the North had Normal School training and most of them were short-term teachers. For example, the first Mennonite teacher at Cross Lake, John Loewen, had graduated from Grade 12 but had no Normal School training. Loewen stayed only for one year (1942-1943). In March 1943, the schoolhouse burned down. Thus when Gerbrandt arrived in 1943, a school building had to be built first.[255]

The United Church missionary at Cross Lake, Fred W. Stevens, had joined the air force in 1942. United Church clergy were concerned that Roman Catholics would take over if they did not replace Stevens with a Protestant. The same concerns applied to teachers in schools. If a United Church teacher's position was vacant, they looked for a Mennonite rather than a Catholic teacher to fill the position.

The Cree expressed their own interests. They sent a petition to head office to ask for a United Church missionary who could speak the Cree language and who would be willing to visit the camps and baptize the newborn children. However, the United Church sent Harry Meadows, an inexperienced young United Church minister, who was more educated than

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United Church of Canada: Archives of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario in Winnipeg (UCA), 509/2/2-5-8. Letter from Felix Scott to J.A. Cormie (Winnipeg), Superintendent of Home Missions, the United Church of Canada, 2 June 1942; Cormie to George Dorey (Toronto), Assistant Secretary of the Board of Home Missions, the United Church of Canada, 24 July 1942; Harry Meadows to Cormie, 26 March 1943; Cormie to Meadows, 5 August 1943;

others at Cross Lake, but depended on an interpreter and proved to be a problem to the United Church Superintendent of Home Mission, Dr. J.A. Cormie, largely because of his arrogant attitudes.[256]

It was not long before tension developed between Meadows, the new United Church minister, and Gerbrandt, the new Mennonite teacher. Meadows accused Gerbrandt of "holding down a safe job" while others were joining the army and sacrificing their lives for their country.[257] Meadows said that U boats were coming to Cross Lake during the war to confer with the German speaking Gerbrandt.[258] Cormie was not sympathetic with Meadows' complaints; nor was George Dorey, Assistant Secretary of the Board of Home Missions in Toronto. About one of Meadows' letters, Dorey wrote to Cormie: "I must say that as usual Harry manages to rub me the wrong way." Cormie told Meadows that unless he changed his attitudes he would be fired.

Tension between Meadows and Gerbrandt was resolved by December of 1943. Then Meadows wrote about Gerbrandt: "The man is excellent. Since he got the school going he has found himself." Meadows continued that he and Gerbrandt had forgiven each other, that they "went down on their knees together and sought God's help and found it in a wonderful way." Now Meadows could happily recommend Gerbrandt for long-time service at Cross Lake.[259]

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[256] Meadows sometimes signed, Harry Meadows, B.A. I don't know his age, but he was married. Meadows' letters to Dr. Cormie are full of advice.

[257]UCA, 509/2/2-5-8, Dorey to Cormie, 20 November 1943.

[258]Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

[259]UCA, 509/2/2-5-8, Meadows to Cormie, 2 December, 1943.

Although Cormie and Dorey were not happy with Meadows' previous attitudes, they did have some concerns about Mennonites in United Church missions and schools. One area of friction during the war was that Mennonites spoke German to each other while they were on the reserves.[260] Some interpreted this as a sign of disloyalty to their country, since Canada was at war with Germany. Of greater concern to United Church missionaries was the rumor that the Mennonites who were working for the United Church refused to baptize infants. In Dorie's letter to Cormie he wrote: "I hope that you will look into the matter of the relation which he has to the Mennonites and also to the question which was raised...where he says the Mennonite missionary does not practice infant baptism."[261] Cormie replied that in his interviews with the Mennonites, they had assured him that "neither [United Church] doctrine nor practice of infant baptism was against their convictions."[262] However, six years later, N.K. Campbell, now Superintendent of Home Missions wrote to a Rev. W.P. Bunt in Vancouver that he feared losing control when too many Mennonites were involved in the United Church program. He continued: "With those that have been employed in the past there were difficulties that grew out of an altogether different conception of the meaning and significance of baptism, their narrow literalism and lack of knowledge of our customs." Campbell was also concerned that Mennonites stayed only for a short term since it took a long time to gain the confidence of the

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UCA, 509/2/2-5-8, Dorey to Cormie, 11 November 1943. See also Cormie to Dorey, 17 November 1943.

261UCA, Dorey to Cormie, 11 November 1943.

262UCA, Cormie to Dorey, 17 November 1943.

Native people.[263] This was, in fact often the case. Both John Loewen (1942 to 1943) and Henry Gerbrandt (1943 to1944) stayed only for one school year.

It is interesting to note Gerbrandt's perception of the Cree at Cross Lake during his year with them. In October, he wrote a letter in the German language to J.W. Schmidt, chairman of the MPM Board in which he described the Cree as "*anstaendig*" (decent). They spoke some English but Gerbrandt realized that he would have had closer relationships with them if he could have spoken the Cree language. Each culture, said Gerbrandt, had its own character which was embedded in the language to some extent. Gerbrandt wanted to try to learn the Cree language since this was necessary to connect with the people (*eine Unterhaltung anknuepfen).* This was no easy task because Gerbrandt's first language was German and he was still adding to his English vocabulary.[264]

Gerbrandt found that Cross Lake was not an easy "field." In his opinion, the Cree had a superficial Christianity instead of a genuine experience with Christ because they had been baptized as infants by United Church or Roman Catholic missionaries, not on confession of their faith as adults. Now they were supposed to build Christian character upon that initial experience, an experience their parents had chosen for them, perhaps as a result of pressure from priests or ministers. Christianity as taught by the United Church looked very shallow to Gerbrandt but he could say nothing against these practices since he was working for the United

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UCA, Property Files of the Superintendents of Home Missions - "Presbyteries Files." Box 509/2/2-16, Campbell to Bunt, 15 February 1949.

[264]MHC, Volume 276, letter from H.J. Gerbrandt to J.W. Schmidt, 3 October 1943.

Church. In February 1944, Gerbrandt wrote that some of the Cree prayed quite enthusiastically, although he could understand only a few of their words.[265]

Gerbrandt was puzzled about the problems of the Cree. He observed that they wanted to own many things without working hard since they thought white people owed them a living. Previously, Gerbrandt had thought that non-Natives were debtors but he changed his mind. He observed that the Cree who did not work deteriorated rapidly, drank a lot, and lived in gross sin. What white people owed the Cree was not material but spiritual gifts, to bring them salvation and the opportunity to change their lives.[266]

Yet, in his memoirs written in the early 1990s, Gerbrandt reflected on his Cross Lake experience somewhat differently than his correspondence with Schmidt indicated. There he wrote that he had learned that the Cree felt defeated by the attempts of government and mainline churches to assimilate them by destroying their culture and language. The Cree were not lazy; rather their concept of time was circular, not linear and progressive like the Mennonite concept of time. Because they hunted and fished, they did not need to be as time conscious as Mennonite farmers. As he reflected on the past, Gerbrandt thought that if the Bergthaler church had not decided that he and his wife should go to Mexico, he would have liked to remain in northern Manitoba among the Cree and Ojibwa. He felt that Mennonites had something unique to offer the Indians which the United and Roman Catholic churches

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Gerbrandt's words are: "*Die Indianer wollen viel haben aber wenig tunm. Sie meinen die weisen menschen sind es ihnen schuldig.*" MHC, Volume 276, letter from Gerbrandt to Schmidt, 7 February 1944. In fact some guilt feelings were evident in MPM Board reports. George Groening wrote that Mennonites were double debtors. They owed the Native people a chance to hear the Gospel but they also felt indebted because they had taken their land and livelihood. George Groening, "*Bericht ueber die Mennonite Pioneer Mission,*" *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1957): 105.

[266]MHC, Volume 276, Gerbrandt to Schmidt, 22 March 1944.

were not giving them. Gerbrandt observed that these churches were tools in the hands of the federal government whose goal was to destroy Native cultures and languages and to assimilate the Indians. When a family refused to have their infant baptized, these churches withheld their government food rations. He wrote: "As I observed this I came to the conclusion that our Anabaptist conviction of adult baptism on confession of faith based on free choice would serve the Indian people better."[267]

In 2002 Gerbrandt reflected on the religious beliefs of the Cree at Cross Lake. Speaking of Native spirituality, he said he had not understood what the children heard in the trees when they walked in the northern woods with him. They said they heard voices singing in the pines but he attributed the voices to demons. In hindsight, Gerbrandt saw that he could have built upon the beliefs that the children already had, that their spirituality was like our Old Testament which led us eventually to belief in Jesus.[268] There is no doubt that the experience of Mennonite teachers on Indian reserves was a key factor in the growing interest in missions to the Cree and Ojibwa of northern Manitoba.

Organization: Mennonite Pioneer Mission (1944)

As a result of their changed ideology, renewal movements, visits from General Conference missionary speakers, and exposure to the wider world, the Bergthaler wanted to

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Gerbrandt, *Hinjawaeajis,* 203. Anabaptists do not baptize infants because they wait for expressions of repentance, belief, and changed behaviour before baptism.

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Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002. Gerbrandt had heard Steven Charleston, a Choctaw Episcopalian Bishop who spoke at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College Winter Lectures in 2000. Charleston's theme was that Native traditional religions parallel the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. Both were there to bring people to belief in Jesus. Therefore, traditional religions were not demonic but were foundational to Christianity. In 2002, Gerbrandt could agree with Charleston but he said that fifty years ago he "could not have handled" Charleston's views.

become a part of a missionary movement.[269] Although the Bergthaler financially supported General Conference missionaries, they wanted to begin their own mission program. In 1940, the Bergthaler *Lehrdienst* (a leadership team made up of lay ministers and the bishop) appointed a missions committee of three–J.W. Schmidt, P.J. Epp, and H.J. Gerbrandt. This committee worked closely with the General Conference.

In 1942, Randall Groening, a Manitoba Bergthaler, went to Mexico to find a suitable mission field and in 1944 he was accepted as the Bergthaler missionary to the Tarahumara Indians. In the same year, Bergthaler church officials met with the General Conference Mission Board in Newton, Kansas to officially launch Mennonite Pioneer Mission. Although the Manitoba Bergthaler had not officially joined the General Conference in 1944, their Missions Committee worked closely with the General Conference Foreign Missions Board in the United States to launch MPM. The members of the General Conference Church and the Bergthaler had the same historical background and the same basic theological beliefs.

The Bergthaler *Lehrdienst* (leadership) had, from time to time since 1884, made recommendations to join the General Conference. Yet, they held back because of what they saw as liberalism in the American Mennonite churches. However, there were many connections. The Bergthaler churches used General Conference hymn books and Sunday school materials. They brought in General Conference missionaries to speak at their annual

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Bergthaler are described as progressive in this chapter not in the sense that they accepted technological changes or tolerated diversity. Progressive in this case means that whereas in the past Mennonites did not organize for missions but remained in their separate enclaves, now they were ready to reach out to peoples of very different backgrounds to bring them the gospel of Jesus. For a good definition of the terms "conservative," "liberal," and "progressive" see Regehr, 20.

mission festivals. They supported these missionaries financially and thought of them as their own.[270]

The Executive of the General Conference and the "brethren from Canada" met together in 13 October 1944, at which time they drew up a plan for cooperation to launch Mennonite Pioneer Mission.[271] The expectation had been that the General Conference would be in charge of the new mission, but MPM was officially organized under the auspices of the Bergthaler churches. A plan of cooperation was drawn up between the Bergthal church in Manitoba and the Board of Foreign Missions of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America. This plan stated:

> Whereas the Bergthal Church of Manitoba has started a mission work in Mexico among the Tarahumara Indians near Creel, and whereas, the Mission Committee of said Church feels that it could and should benefit from the experience of the Board of Foreign Missions, and Whereas, the Board of Foreign Missions in the fall of 1943 sent the representatives Wm. Voth and Gerald Stucky to Latin America including Mexico to explore the possibilities of missions, and these representatives visited the field near Creel and reported quite favorably on it, and whereas, the Mission Committee of the Bergthal Church desires that the Board of Foreign Missions cooperate with them in this mission enterprise, be it resolved that the following plan of cooperation be set into motion.[272]

Then followed a constitution with eight by-laws to regulate cooperation between the Bergthal church and the General Conference. The first by-law of the constitution read thus: "The Missions Committee of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church has the powers to appoint and send workers to its mission field but these workers must also be approved by the Board of Missions

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[270]Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 354-359.

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MHC, Vol. 352, Minutes of the Executive Meeting (General Conference) with "Brethren in Canada," 13 October 1944. See "Plan of Cooperation in Mission Work in Manitoba by the Bergthal Church in Manitoba and the Board of Foreign Missions of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America," Vol. 352, File 8200-10, MPM minutes, 1944-1949.

[272]Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC), Vol. 352, File 8200-10, MPM Minutes, 1944-1949.

of the General Conference Mennonite Church."[273] Basically, the plan left the Bergthal church free to choose missionary candidates and to support them financially, with the approval of the General Conference. The General Conference could send candidates of their own, with the approval of the Bergthaler, but then they would be financially supported by the General Conference. Reports of missionary work would be sent both to the General Conference and to the Bergthal church. In sum, the two organizations worked closely together in launching Mennonite Pioneer Mission but the Bergthaler church was responsible and the General Conference functioned in an advisory capacity.

Mennonite Pioneer Mission in Mexico (1944-1948): Failure

During the school year of 1944 to 1945, Gerbrandt studied at the Toronto Medical Institute and in the summer of 1945, he took courses at Wycliffe Linguistic School.[274] In December 1945, Henry and Susan Gerbrandt joined the Groenings (Groening had married a Mexican woman) in Creel as missionaries to the Tarahumara Indians under the auspices of MPM. For various reasons, the mission field in Mexico did not work out well. Groening developed tensions with the church and the Gerbrandts were not able to get permanent working visas. Moreover, the land on which the mission was located had been granted to MPM only because Mrs. Groening was a Mexican and when the Groenings left, MPM could not claim the property. The Gerbrandts tried to work in another Mexican location for Wycliffe Translators,

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[273]Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith,* 334.

[274]

The Toronto Medical Institute was non-denominational, organized by a nurse called Miss Kirby who taught missionaries medical skills to take to the mission field. The Wycliffe Linguistic School was also non-denominational and is still an organization that specializes in translation of many languages. Gerbrandt attended Wycliffe at Briercrest, Saskatchewan, where Wycliffe had rented temporary space for their classes. Susan Gerbrandt, telephone conversation, 10 May 2005.

but when Daniel J. Unruh, Vice President of the General Conference Foreign Missions Board went to Mexico to investigate the situation, he recommended to MPM that the Mexican work should be discontinued.[275] In September 1948, the Gerbrandts returned to Manitoba. Although there was talk about the Gerbrandts going as missionaries to a northern reserve, they stayed in southern Manitoba.

In 2002 Gerbrandt, reflecting on the Mexican experience, said that the Mexico mission was bound to fail because neither the Gerbrandts nor the Board were ready for it. He remarked that MPM broke the law by going into Mexico–they did not have the proper papers and credentials to begin a mission in that country.[276] Mexico actually did not allow professional missionaries or church workers into the country. Other missions had failed to gain entrance. MPM missionaries did not have administrative experience or proper training and they went to Mexico against the advice of Wycliffe Translators and the General Conference Mission Board.[277]

In 1950 Gerbrandt, while teaching at Elim Bible School in Altona, became the Secretary of MPM, a position he held until 1966.[278] In that role, he corresponded with MPM missionaries and often went north to visit them. In view of the feelings that the United Church Home Mission Board and their missionaries had towards Mennonites in the 1940s, it is

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MHC, Volume 276, Board of Missions Correspondence 1943-1953, letter from Daniel J. Unruh to members of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission Board, 14 July 1948.

[276]Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

[277]Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 337-338.

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The Elim Bible School was begun by the Bergthaler congregations in Gretna, Manitoba in 1929 and moved to Altona in 1940. It was a Fundamentalist school when it began and it continued to be evangelical and Anabaptist. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 276.

somewhat ironic that, in 1963, the United Church began correspondence with Gerbrandt about "sharing the ministry and so instead of working in competition for the same ends we may stop the waste of personnel and resources by not competing any longer."[279] A pilot plan for cooperation was to take effect at Cross Lake between Mennonite missionary Ernie Sawatzky and United Church missionary Bud Bewell. Each was to "accept the other's doctrines as being valid. Ultimately it might mean the total disintegration of one or the other of the church bodies."[280] Unfortunately the Missions Boards of the United Church of Canada and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, who met many times over this important issue, decided that the step was too big to take and they settled for smaller goals in which they would cooperate, such as the physical welfare of the Cree, instruction in day schools, and community development.[281]

Mennonite Pioneer Mission in Northern Manitoba: An Enduring Presence

The newly organized MPM was not about to give up on mission work after their failure in Mexico. Even before the Gerbrandts returned from Mexico, the Board turned their attention toward northern Manitoba. As early as 1946, MPM Board members were corresponding with interested people about beginning missions among the Indians. In October 1946, Harvey Toews, a Mennonite working for the United Church mission at Island Lake, Manitoba, wrote to the *Bergthaler Aeltester* (Elder or Bishop) Schulz that Red Sucker Lake was an ideal place

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UCA, Box 509/2/2-16, R.G. Campbell (Convenor of Home Missions for Hudson Bay Presbytery) to Rev. N.K. Campbell, 4 January 1963.

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UCA, Box 509/2/2-16, minutes of meeting of the Mission Boards of the United Church of Canada and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 11 February 1963.

281

UCA, Box 509/2/2-16, minutes of the Mission Board of the United Church of Canada, 18 March 1963.

to begin a Mennonite mission. The advantages were that they could reach Indians without having to go through government red tape, since Red Sucker was just off the reserve. In order to build a church on a reserve, the Indians had to issue an invitation, and the Indian agent and the federal government had to give their consent and they preferred Anglican, United Church, or Roman Catholic churches. For this reason it would be easier for MPM to build off the reserve but near it.[282] The Hudson's Bay Company was planning to open a store at Red Sucker, so the people would be attracted to the place. The people were all United or Roman Catholic members but no missionaries were at Red Sucker Lake at the time. Toews thought MPM should begin a mission before the Catholics returned.[283]

However, MPM did not begin a station at Red Sucker Lake. The first MPM location in Manitoba was at Matheson Island, a small island, 3.5 by 1.5 miles, located at the Narrows of Lake Winnipeg, around 100 miles north of Winnipeg. Matheson Island had been a natural stopping place for the Hudson's Bay Company York boats since it became a subsidiary post in 1867. The Matheson Island people descended from Norwegian, English, and Icelandic settlers who had intermarried with Indians. Although no resident missionary had lived at Matheson Island before the Mennonites came, the Islanders had been in contact with Roman Catholics,

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Red Sucker Lake is near Island Lake, Manitoba, close to the Ontario border. *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1957), 104. MHC, Volume 276, Board of Missions Correspondence 1943-1953, letter from Harvey Toews to *Aeltester* Schulz, 6 November 1946. Toews wrote in the German language. In 1950, Toews was a student at Goshen College in Indiana and was a candidate for overseas missions. *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1950): 85.

[283]Toews to Schulz, 6 November 1946.

Methodists, Anglicans, and Pentecostals. In 1947, nineteen families of mixed ancestry lived there: eighteen Anglican and one Roman Catholic.[284]

In June 1948 one H. Neufeld wrote to Jacob Hoeppner in Altona, Secretary of the MPM Board, that he had visited Lake Winnipeg communities on his way to Berens River. The people at Matheson Island had asked for a Protestant to begin Sunday school for their children and church services for adults. They said they would be willing to help along.[285] The MPM Board "saw this as a call from God" and sent J.W. Schmidt, Chairman of MPM, and D.H. Loewen who visited all of the homes on Matheson Island, conducted church services and held a child dedication.[286] They made a recommendation to the Board that MPM should begin a mission at Matheson Island because no resident church worker from another denomination was there at the time, the people wanted a Protestant minister, and Matheson Island was in a location to reach other potential areas.[287]

An undated trip report (author not given) reveals some of the methods or strategies that were part of the Board's plan. Matheson Island was central for connections to Bloodvein

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See von Gunten, 21-24, 298-306. See also *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1951): 136.

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MHC, Volume 276, letter from H.Neufeld, Winnipeg to Rev. Jacob Hoeppner, Altona, 19 June 1948. This letter is in the German language. H.Neufeld was likely a son to Rev. Herman Neufeld, a Mennonite leader. He taught at Berens River for his alternative service during World War II and stayed as pastor of the Berens River United Church. Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002.

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It could be argued that child dedication and infant baptism are similar. Child dedication and infant baptism take place when parents want their child to grow up as a Christian. Confirmation and adult baptism take place when grown-up children decide they agree with their parents earlier wishes for them.

[287]See von Gunten, 304.

Reserve, Rabbit Point, Jackhead, Beach Point, Pine Dock, and Black Bear Island. The members of the Board reasoned that since it was difficult to get federal government permission to start a mission on a reserve, it would be easier to have the mission at a place where the reserve was within easy access. The Board seemed to be interested in the Matheson Island people as a base to reach people on the Bloodvein reserve and other areas in the north.[288]

Another part of the Board's plan was to place Mennonite teachers at locations where they hoped one day to begin a mission. The teachers would lay the foundation for a mission by incorporating religious teachings into their curriculums. MPM contacted the Winnipeg Normal School, the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, and the Mennonite Brethren Bible College to find young people who were willing to teach in the north. The Department of Education gladly sent those whom the MPM Board recommended to schools along the shores of Lake Winnipeg.[289]

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At first the Board thought the best possibility for a mission was on the Bloodvein Reserve. MHC, Volume 276, J.N. Hoeppner to "*Liebe Brueder,*" 30 July 1946. Although Matheson Island was central to many small adjacent places and to the Bloodvein Reserve, it was far away from southern Manitoba Mennonites. With the exception of the Bloodvein Reserve, these places were sparsely populated as they were sites for lighthouses or fishing stations. In 1946, there were 20 children enroled at the Pine Dock school, having six different surnames. von Gunten, 380. The population of Bloodvein Reserve in 1959 was 202. Menno Wiebe, "Specialization among the Northern Ojibwa: a paradigmatic process" (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1973), 15. In 1958, the population of Matheson Island was 175 persons of mixed ancestry, and at Pine Dock 100 persons of mixed ancestry. von Gunten, 8.

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MHC, Volume 352, Matheson Island Trip Report, no date, no author. This report was possibly by Theodore Groening, a Board member, who visited Matheson Island around 1948.

One of the major objectives of MPM was to establish Mennonite churches among the peoples of northern Manitoba.[290] However, MPM soon found that even though the people came to Mennonite services, they remained loyal to the denomination that had baptized them and their parents before them. Most of the northern people had been baptized as infants by Anglicans, United Church, or Roman Catholics. This posed a problem that would become difficult to resolve.

The First Call

The MPM Board initially planned to send Mr. and Mrs. J.G. Kehler, who had applied as missionaries, to Matheson Island but they found that the Kehlers had also applied to Northern Canada Evangelical Mission.[291] Further, the Kehlers were not Bergthaler members and they were baptized by immersion.[292] For these reasons, the Board turned their attention elsewhere.

Jake and Trudie Unrau, living in the St. Vital area of Winnipeg, were waiting for a call to be missionaries. Jake was working for Motor Coach Industries and Jake and Trudie were

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MHC, Volume 4998, Report on Loon Straits by Otto Hamm, October 1963. Hamm had attended the first baptism at Loon Straits. Of this event, he wrote: "For us it was the beginning of that for which we have long prayed, the establishment of a church, conversion and baptism by our mission in Loon Straits."

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MHC, Volume 276, letter from MPM Board to Northern Canada Evangelical Mission, 27 July 1948. The Northern Canada Evangelical Mission was an interdenominational faith organization with headquarters in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. In 1954 they had more than forty missionaries in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and in the North West Territories. Their goal was to begin indigenous churches among Native peoples. See *Mennonite Pioneer Quarterly* (September 1954): 11.

292

MHC, Volume 276, letter from J.N. Hoeppner to J.G. Kehler, 25 September 1948. The Bergthaler Mennonites form of baptism was pouring, not immersion.

growing cucumbers on their acre of land to support missions. They had two daughters and Trudie was pregnant. On September 23, 1948, Jacob W. Schmidt, Chairman of MPM, and Abram Klassen, also from the Board, came to the Unraus to ask them to consider going to Matheson Island as missionaries. Apparently the Unraus said yes immediately.[293]

In the beginning of October, 1948, the Unraus purchased clothes, insulation, storm windows, and carpets from the Hudson's Bay Company in Winnipeg with two hundred dollars given to them by the MPM Board On October 14, Jacob and Trudie Unrau, with their family, traveled to Matheson Island on the *S.S. Keenora.* Theodore Groening, MPM Board member, accompanied them to help them settle and make repairs in the old school house.[294] A letter addressed to Mr. Ed Kirkness, storekeeper on the island, telling the Matheson Island people that the Unraus were coming, was on the boat as well. Since the Matheson Island people had no advance notice that their new resident missionaries were arriving at this particular time, no one met them at the dock when they arrived at the location that was to become the first MPM mission in northern Manitoba.

Actually, it seems that there was a larger problem than late communication. The Matheson Island people had wanted an Anglican missionary. Ed Kirkness had sent a request for a missionary to the Anglican Church which somehow ended up with MPM who thought of

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MHC, Volume 4461, Jacob M. Unrau collection. This collection contains five of Unrau's personal diaries, from 1943 to 1953, handwritten in the English language. Unrau has good, legible handwriting though his spelling is not always correct. The diaries seem to be daily entries, written as events occurred. The collection also contains sermon notes, Sunday school attendance records and correspondence. Perhaps these diaries were written later. They are much like Unrau's book.

[294]MHC, Volume 4461, diaries. See also Unrau, 45-46.

the letter as their "Macedonian call."[295] The MPM Board discovered the mistake after the Unraus were already on the Island. However Groening, in his 1957 Board report to the conference, said that this had been no mistake on God's part. God had led MPM to this place at this time.[296]

What was the attitude of the MPM Board towards the Native peoples in northern Manitoba? George Groening, Chairman of the Board and editor of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly for many years, wrote in 1957 that there were white people, "Metis," and treaty and non-treaty Indians in the North. With regard to the Indians it was a mistake on the part of southern Manitoba Mennonites to think that they were all beggars. When Indians' physical needs were met, they were skillful, cunning, strong, and had great stamina. Their population was growing since the turn of the century, so the theory of their extinction was no longer valid. They had been in contact with Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Church, and Pentecostal missionaries so nearly all of them had been baptized and belonged to one of these churches. Yet, they were half-Christians only; their Christianity was only an outward form since they had not truly received the message of personal salvation through Christ. Many of them still beat drums at funerals, and were superstitious, and some secretly practiced sorcery (casting an evil spell on an enemy). Their moral standards were low. They drank heavily, but that was because they had no meaningful employment.[297] The Board was of the opinion that

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"Macedonian call" has reference to Acts 16:9, where the Apostle Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia (northern Greece) "pleading with him: 'Come over here and help us.'"

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Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook (1957): 102. See also Gerbrandt, *Hinjawoaeajis, 204.*

[297]*Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1957): 102-103.

the work of mainline Protestant missionaries had not been of much use to northern Manitoba Natives.

Time: Mid Twentieth Century

When MPM began in 1948, Mennonites thought differently than they had in the 1880s when the General Conference began their mission to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi. In the 1880s, American Mennonite boards, constituencies, and missionaries were holistic in their approach to missions, ministering to both physical and spiritual needs. However, the Modernist/Fundamentalist debate affecting both American and Canadian Mennonites by the 1940s changed Mennonite thought.[298] Fundamentalism impacted southern Manitoba Mennonites through the Winnipeg Bible Institute (now Providence), a non-denominational, evangelical school with a militaristic mentality, and later through CFAM, a religious radio station, Some Mennonite young people studied at Winnipeg Bible Institute and many Mennonites in southern Manitoba supported the school and the radio station financially.[299]

In contrast to Fundamentalism, more cosmopolitan thought came as a result of exposure to the wider world. Because of the atrocities committed in the First World War and especially the Second World War, the general public was becoming increasingly aware of the adverse effects of racism. Because Mennonites were pacifists, many men left home to join conscientious objector camps. Some rejected the nonresistant stance of their churches and

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For a fuller review of Fundamentalism see Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, 48-56. See also H.S. Bender, "Fundamentalism," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II: 418-419. Bender lists the nine fundamentals that make up "standards of evangelical orthodoxy." According to fundamentalists, the Bible was inerrant, meaning free from error.

[299]Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

joined the army. The First and Second World Wars brought young men into contact with the wider world where they learned to be less discriminating and more accepting of all peoples.

Another difference between the 1940s and the 1880s was the amount of previous exposure to Christianity that Native peoples had had through the missions of other denominations. The first Mennonite missionaries to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi in the 1880s were still under Grant's Peace Policy which made them solely responsible for a particular field. Until the 1880s, only the Quakers had permission to have a mission for the Cheyenne and Arapaho while the Hopi had been exposed to the Mormons.[300] From 1880 onward, Mennonites had government permission to build their missions and contact the Native peoples without competition from other denominations.

Government placement of denominations ended with the Dawes Act, passed in 1887, though it did not immediately take effect. It was not until the 1890s that Rodolphe Petter began to lament the encroachment of other denominations into Cantonment in Indian Territory. In contrast, many northern Manitoba Cree and Ojibwa, by the 1940s, had been exposed to Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist (after 1925 the United Church) teachings. Previous Native connections with Christian missionaries who taught different doctrines made mission work more complicated for Mennonite Pioneer missionaries than for General Conference missionaries.

Did the Mennonite Pioneer Mission follow the model of the General Conference which had preceded them by over sixty years and with which they cooperated and collaborated?

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Hopi ancestors had been in contact with Roman Catholicism in the early seventeenth century. They drove the Spanish and their Franciscan missionaries out in 1680 and ended their dominance for a time. In 1692, the Spanish returned, but most of the Hopi remained hostile toward the Jesuit missionaries who replaced the Franciscans. Scott Peterson, *Native American Prophecies*, 2d ed., (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1999), 246. See also James, 50-62.

Henry Gerbrandt, long time secretary of MPM, reflected upon this question. He said they followed the American example by building stations. Buildings were the "visible mission."[301] In other methods and aspects of missions, they were more reluctant to follow American advice. After all, Canadian Mennonites thought of American Mennonites as liberal.[302] That Mennonite Pioneer Mission personnel did not necessarily learn from General Conference experience is illustrated by Randall Groening's correspondence with P.A. Penner, office manager of headquarters of the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America. Penner, a veteran missionary in India, gave several reasons why it was not advisable to have new converts living on a mission compound. Groening systematically refuted all of Penner's reasons, closing with the remark that Penner's advice had value in highlighting awareness of problems that could arise.[303] Nonetheless, Groening followed his own instincts among the Tarahumara Indians in Mexico rather than accepting the advice he got from Penner.

Yet the communication between the General Conference Mission Board and the Mennonite Pioneer Mission was strong, demonstrated by the persons who were chosen to speak at important Bergthaler church occasions. For example in fall of 1945 John P. Suderman, a General Conference missionary from Oraibi, Arizona, spoke to the churches of southern Manitoba at their Harvest and Missions Festival.[304] In fall of 1946, the General

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[301]Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

[302]Ben Sawatzky (Mennonite lay minister and General Conference worker), interview with Alvina Block, 1 June 2003.

[303]MHC, Volume 276, P.A. Penner to Randall Groening, 13 September 1945. Groening's rebuttals are written on the back of Penner's letter.

[304]MHC, Volume 276, John P. Suderman to J.N. Hoeppner, 24 August 1945.

Conference sent a donation of four hundred dollars to Mennonite Pioneer Mission for the work in Mexico.[305] When the mission among the Tarahumara Indians was in trouble, the Vice President of the Board of Foreign Missions of the General Conference went to Mexico in 1948, at the MPM Board's request, to evaluate the mission, pinpoint the problems, and recommend closure.[306] Unruh actually recommended that the Gerbrandts should go as missionaries to the Hopi to strengthen the bonds between the two mission boards, but that did not happen.[307]

In 1960 the Bergthaler mission board merged with the Foreign Mission Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (known as the Commission of Overseas Mission) which, in turn, cooperated with the General Conference mission board known as the Commission on Overseas Missions. It was not until 1968 that the Bergthaler became official members of the General Conference. The reason for holding back was that Canadian Mennonites thought American Mennonites were too tolerant. Some contentious issues were the use of the English rather than the German language in the churches, the paid pastoral system instead of an unpaid lay ministry, and the active participation and dress of women in the church.[308]

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MHC, Volume 276, H.J. Gerbrandt to the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America.

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Tensions had developed between Groening and the MPM Board over monetary issues and nonresistance. The Gerbrandts were never able to get long term visas to Mexico. See Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 335.

307

MHC, Volume 276, Daniel J. Unruh to members of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission, 14 July 1948.

[308]Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, 354-360.

The following chapter presents case studies of missionaries J.A. Unrau and Henry Neufeld, paying attention to their methods and attitudes in their work at Matheson Island and Pauingassi. Did their methods and attitudes change during their stay in the North?

Chapter Five

Mennonite Pioneer Mission to Matheson Island and Pauingassi: 1948-1980

Overview of Mennonite Pioneer Mission Locations

As we saw in the last chapter, Mennonite Pioneer Mission (MPM) was founded in 1944. After the fiasco in Mexico MPM started nine mission locations in northern Manitoba, although a few of these stations were of short duration.[309] From these bases, MPM workers also connected with some adjoining localities. The first station, Matheson Island, served people who were of mixed descent[310] and spoke English. They made their living through fishing, trapping, hunting, logging, and freighting. One of the leading families at Matheson Island was the Settee family, of British and Cree ancestry. They were descendants of James Settee, a Cree from Split Lake who, together with Henry Budd and Charles Pratt, was brought to Red River by John West of the Church Missionary Society in 1824. Settee was educated at Red River and became an ordained Anglican priest who ministered in many places in Saskatchewan and Manitoba between 1841 and 1899. He visited the Berens River and Manitoba Lake Post areas but never lived there. His two sons worked at the East Dog Head

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For a complete summary of early MPM stations, see Peter D. Fast, "The Mennonite Pioneer Mission: a venture of faith," a paper presented to H.S. Bender, Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, 25 August, 1960. MHC, Vol. 4998, File 56. Neill and Edith von Gunten moved to Riverton later, in 1976, and began contacts with people there. A Mennonite church called the Riverton Fellowship Circle was founded in 1996.

310

In the MPM records, people of mixed descent are consistently called Metis, although they themselves did not necessarily use that term.

post near Matheson Island in 1867. The Islanders, mostly Settee's descendants, were predominantly Anglican.[311]

However, not all Settees were biologically related, since James Settee gave his name to some of the individuals whom he baptized when he passed through the Matheson Island area.[312]

Before air travel became common, Matheson Island could be reached only by boat or on winter roads, when the lake was frozen, with dog sleds and bombardiers (a type of power toboggan or snowmobile). It was virtually inaccessible to the outside world during spring break-up and fall freeze-up in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[313]

As noted earlier, Jake and Trudie Unrau, the first Mennonite Pioneer missionaries, began a mission at Matheson Island in October 1948.[314] The following year, MPM opened a mission at Pine Dock, also known as Little Bullhead. Pine Dock was located on the mainland twelve miles south of Matheson Island and could be reached by road. Its residents were also people of mixed descent who fished and engaged in other occupations such as lumbering. Pine Dock had for many years served as a mail distribution point and a stopping place for boats that

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[311]von Gunten, 543.

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See von Gunten, 543. See also Lewis G. Thomas, "Settee, James," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* Vol. XIII, 937-939. Their Anglican leanings seem logical if their ancestor was indeed James Settee.

[313]Unrau, 52.

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This is an overview. Case studies of some of these missionaries follow in which more detail about their lives will be given.

sailed on Lake Winnipeg.[315] George and Agatha Andres were the first MPM missionaries at Pine Dock.

In 1953, MPM began a station at Anama Bay, located west of Lake Winnipeg on the Dauphin River, two miles from the Dauphin River Indian reserve, in the vicinity of the Jackhead and Lake St. Martin reserves. Anglicans and Roman Catholics had already been active among the Ojibwa on these reserves but a Mennonite report described their churches as almost empty in the 1950s.[316] The Andres family was transferred to Anama Bay from Pine Dock. Andres used Anama Bay as a stepping stone to reach the Ojibwa on the reserves, but the mission was discontinued in less than two years.

In 1954, MPM considered opening a station at Little Grand Rapids, an Ojibwa reserve up the Berens River. When Pauingassi leader Alex Owen extended an invitation to his community about 12 miles distant, however, the Board decided to establish a mission station there instead. Pauingassi lies on Fishing Lake north of Little Grand Rapids, approximately 165 air miles northeast of Winnipeg, near the Manitoba/Ontario border. Pauingassi was not accessible by road (except when the lake was frozen) but could be reached either by boat, which involved many portages up the Berens River, or by plane. The Pauingassi people spoke only the Ojibwe language. An MPM brochure reported in 1958 that, according to oral tradition, the Pauingassi Ojibwa came to Manitoba from Ontario more than one hundred years earlier. They did not want to be part of the Little Grand Rapids reserve, yet the federal

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Pine Dock was already a stopping place in 1918 when Frederick Leach, a Roman Catholic priest who spent over fifty years in northern Manitoba, traveled north on the *Wolverine* that stopped there to refuel Frederick Leach, *59 Years with Indians and Settlers on Lake Winnipeg* (1976), 4.

316 *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (April 1953): 14.

government treated them as part of the reserve. Although the government gave Pauingassi Ojibwa treaty money, they had not begun a school for the Pauingassi children or supplied building materials for homes because the Pauingassi people did not live on the Little Grand Rapids Reserve. Though they were poor, the people were happy, reported an MPM brochure. Their main occupations were trapping, fishing and harvesting wild rice.[317] The MPM Board sent Henry and Elna Neufeld to Pauingassi in 1955.

In the same year that MPM established a station at Pauingassi, they investigated possibilities at Loon Straits, twenty-five miles southeast of Matheson Island, also on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. The main occupation of the mixed descent people at Loon Straits was fishing. Many of the people in the Lake Winnipeg area were descended from Red River families who had attended Anglican or Presbyterian churches. Some had been in contact with Brethren Assemblies.[318] Responding to an invitation from Loon Straits Christians, Jake and Helen Wiebe spent the summers of 1955 and 1956 there. During this time MPM built a chapel at Loon Straits and the work was generally successful and satisfactory to the people. However, Jake Wiebe could not be at Loon Straits during the winter because he was an instructor at the Elim Bible School in Altona. In January of 1957, Edwin and Margaret Brandt came to Loon Straits as resident missionaries.

Another MPM station was opened in 1956 at Cross Lake, 350 miles north of Winnipeg. Unlike other stations located along the eastern shores of Lake Winnipeg, Cross Lake was north of the lake and many of the people were Cree. Whereas the population of

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MHC, Volume 362, *Pauingassi Missions Station*, Altona, Manitoba, 1958. This brochure is in the German language.

[318]See chapter six for more about Brethren Assemblies.

other MPM stations numbered from 100 to 200, Cross Lake had 1500 residents.[319] The Cross Lake Cree hunted, trapped, and fished but also received financial assistance from the government.[320] Otto and Margaret Hamm were the first MPM missionaries at Cross Lake.

The MPM station at Manigotagan, begun in 1957, was located 130 miles northeast of Winnipeg. Like the people of mixed descent around them, the Manigotagan people fished, trapped and lumbered but also had opportunities for prospecting and mining at the town of Bissett, 35 miles away. The Hollow Water (or Hole River) Indian Reserve was located near Manigotagan. When Jake and Trudie Unrau left Matheson Island, they became the first MPM missionaries at Manigotagan.[321]

In 1961, the MPM Board placed Emil and Evelyn Schmidt at the Bloodvein Indian Reserve, twelve miles across Lake Winnipeg from Matheson Island. Some of the Bloodvein parents were dissatisfied with the Roman Catholics, who had provided education for their children since 1920. In 1964 these parents asked, in writing, for a Mennonite school to be opened. Thereafter there were two schools at Bloodvein, one with Roman Catholic teachers and the other with Mennonite teachers, both run by the provincial Department of Education.[322]

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[319]The population of Cross Lake in 2005 was ca. 5,000.

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See Ernie Sawatzky, "Canada's Indians Live in Another World: How to Clothe Gospel Message in the Cultural Garb of Their Society," *The Canadian Mennonite* (15 March, 1963): 5, 8. Not all Cross Lake people were Cree. Some Cross Lake people were of mixed ancestry.

[321]Much of the above information is taken from Fast.

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Leach, 16. See also letter from R.F. Davey (Superintendent of Education) to C.A. F. Clark ((Assistant Director of Education), 9 October 1964, Treaty & Aboriginal Rights Research Centre of Manitoba, RG10, Vol. 8607, File 506/1-13-005. Davey wrote that because some parents at Bloodvein had requested in writing that they wanted their children in a Mennonite school "it has been recommended that the Department establish a second school on the Bloodvein Reserve to be taught by a Mennonite teacher." I have not found the letter written by

This chapter focuses on two of the missionaries named above, Jacob M. Unrau and Henry Neufeld. It will describe their initial attitudes, methods, and changes that took place as a result of their interactions with the people of mixed ancestry, the Ojibwa, and the Cree, while tracing the outlooks and approaches that evolved more broadly in the MPM Board and its Mennonite constituency.

It is important to note that missionary wives played a major role as well. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, Bergthaler women did not have a high public profile. Church business meetings were known as *Bruderschaft* (brotherhood meetings). Women had no vote and usually did not even attend the *Bruderschaft*. In 1968, the Bergthaler church decided that women could vote but they could not be elected to any church positions. They were not delegates to conferences, as a rule, until the 1970s. The ordained order was that "men worked for the Lord and women played supportive rules but remained in the background." Single women could be ordained as missionaries but that ordination was not equivalent to being a pastor.[323]

Yet, as Myra Rutherdale has pointed out, gender roles in the north were more flexible than in home churches.[324] Recently Henry Neufeld stressed that male missionaries could not have done what they did without their wives.[325] The women were supportive in all of the vast changes involved in living in the North, away from family and friends and often without the amenities they were used to. They were hospitable to visitors from the south as well as to the

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the Bloodvein parents.

[323]Adolf Ens, 160-163.

[324]Rutherdale, 54.

[325]Henry Neufeld, telephone conversation with Alvina Block, 6 December 2005.

people living around them. However, young missionary wives were more housebound than their husbands because they had children to look after. Frequently they traveled to southern Manitoba for the birth of a baby. Their role in the community fell within the division of labor commonly assigned to Mennonite women in the 1940s and 50s–to teach the Native women how to sing, sew, quilt, and bake. When trappers were away for long periods of time, Elna Neufeld held meetings with the women. She also taught school in 1957 while Henry watched the two Neufeld children as they played in his workshop.[326] Sometimes wives also wrote prayer letters to the constituency. They were included in the titles of their husband's memoirs, but on the whole the books were written in the first person and centered around the male missionary. Because the active, public role belonged to the male missionary, I am focusing more on the men, while mentioning their wives where they were involved.

Jacob M. Unrau

Jacob Unrau, MPM's first missionary to northern Manitoba, was born in 1920. He grew up in a German-speaking Sommerfelder home near Gretna, Manitoba. The Sommerfelder were conservative Mennonites who had broken from the more progressive Manitoba Bergthaler in 1890 over the education issue referred to in Chapter 4. Unrau's grandparents and parents were threatened by the English language because they thought it "would take children away from the church and cause them to lose their faith."[327]

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The description of the role of missionary wives is taken from Unrau, *Living in the Way and from* Henry and Elna Neufeld, *By God's Grace*. Elna Neufeld's year of teaching while Henry watched the children further exemplifies Myra Rutherdale's point that gender boundaries sometimes became more flexible in the north than in home church communities. See also *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (July 1957): 9.

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See Unrau, 6. See also Harold S. Bender, "Sommerfeld Mennonites," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, 576-578.

When Unrau was eleven years old, his family joined the more liberal Bergthaler Church, as a result of his mother's death and his father's remarriage to a member of that church. Unrau's parents struggled financially because they had a large family to support. When he was fourteen, Unrau had to go to work to help financially, so he could not finish public school. At the age of nineteen, he accepted Jesus in response to an invitation given by a missionary from Africa who spoke at one of the Bergthaler congregations. After taking catechism classes Unrau was baptized by Elder David Schulz as an adult upon confession of his faith. The Bergthaler form of baptism was to pour a small amount of water on the candidate's head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Church membership was a natural component of baptism.

In the winter of 1940-41, Unrau attended the Elim Bible School at Altona, Manitoba, a school run by a society representing the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference.[328] Courses consisting of Bible outline, homiletics, doctrine, church history, missions, singing, and grammar were taught in the German language. An English composition course was included in the curriculum.[329] Although courses at Elim did not include cross-cultural preparation, the school stressed missions and invited many faith mission speakers.[330]

In the summer of 1941, Unrau served in the government's alternative service program for conscientious objectors. Although he spent four months at Riding Mountain National Park,

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[328] The Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference is also known as the Rudnerweider Church. The school opened in 1939 and closed in 1989. See Anna Ens, 213.

[329] Unrau, 40.

[330] Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002.

Unrau apparently did not take note of the Ojibwa in the area as he makes no mention of them in his autobiography. He returned to Elim for the school year of 1941 to 1942 and began a new semester in the fall of 1942, but he had to leave early in 1943 when the government sent him to work at a pulp and paper mill in Kapuskasing, Ontario. In total, Unrau spent thirty-two months in alternative service, doing various jobs in different places.

In May of 1943, Jake Unrau married Trudie Giesbrecht, a fellow student at Elim Bible School who shared his call to missions. Trudie also grew up in a conservative German-speaking home located near Gretna. She attended a missionary meeting when she was six or seven years old and felt called to be a missionary. She shared her feelings with her father, but at the time, he was opposed to the idea. However six years before she married Jake, her father said that he remembered what she had said as a child, and if she wanted to become a missionary she should go to Canada's northern Indians rather than to Africa.[331]

In the spring of 1948, both Trudie and Jake graduated from Elim's four-year program. By this time, they had two children. Unrau states in his book that Elim was their "main supporting body" that had "nurtured [their] vision for full-time ministry." When they accepted the call from the MPM Board in the fall of 1948, they felt "confident" that they had "made the only logical decision... in light of [their] strong sense of calling and years of preparation." Yet they also knew that they were not well prepared to go to the people of northern Manitoba.[332] They were not qualified to teach school and they had no cross-cultural training.

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[331] Unrau, 32. This is a curious reversal of the appeal to missions in far away places.

[332]Unrau, 42-43.

Unrau's Initial Attitudes and Methods

One of the first problems that the Unrau family had to face when they arrived at Matheson Island was the language issue. The Matheson Island people spoke English, but the Unrau's first language was German--Low German was their daily language, while High German was their official church language. Although the Unraus spoke some English, they did not think in English.[333] Unrau wrote:

> Since the Islanders spoke only English and we had only limited experience with the language, every conversation in the early years was also a language lesson. When it came to Sunday school and services we were forced to translate theological terms and concepts into English.[334]

Unrau's early correspondence with the MPM Board was in the German language. Poor command of the English language resulted in some embarrassing incidents. A colleague recalled that once, while conducting a burial, Unrau said: "Let's lower the carcass into the grave."[335]

Unrau found that the Islanders expected him to have regular services; they assumed that was his purpose for coming. His impression was that "for the most part they were Christians" since the Anglican Church had been active at Matheson Island. Beginning as early as 1912, Anglican priests had visited the Island to serve communion and baptize the children.[336] Some of the teachers at the Matheson Island school had been Anglican, and had

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[333]Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002.

[334]Unrau, 52.

[335]Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

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These could be old Red River families with ancestors baptized in the 1820s and on by Anglicans. The Settee family, mentioned earlier, is one example. John Thomas, the first Matheson Island resident, was born at St. Andrews, Manitoba. See von Gunten, 566.

begun a Sunday school in 1929. However, there had never been a resident Anglican missionary at Matheson Island. As has been mentioned earlier, when they heard that they were getting a resident missionary in 1948, the Islanders expected an Anglican missionary to come, not a Mennonite. The Settee family had donated land for a church building, but when MPM wanted to build on the land, they were told it had been set aside for an Anglican Church.[337]

Another contact the Islanders had had with Christianity was through visits by a boat sent by the Calvary Temple, a church in Winnipeg. The *Calvary Temple Gospel Messenger* came in the summers of 1948 to 1951 to conduct services at the Matheson Island fishing camps. This boat ministry was sponsored by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.[338] Unrau felt reluctant to cooperate fully with the Pentecostals because he thought their emphasis on healing the sick, the second filling of the Holy Spirit, and speaking in tongues would confuse prospective converts.[339]

Although Unrau sometimes acknowledged that the Islanders were Christians, he still looked for individual public commitments to Christ; obviously he was not satisfied with the

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[337]MHC, Vol. 352, "*Matheson Island Reise Bericht.*"

[338]von Gunten, 299, 305, 310.

[339]
MHC, Volume 280, Trudie and Jake Unrau to *"Lieber Bruder im Herrn."* 29 March 1949. Pentecostals emphasize the filling of the Holy Spirit as a separate and subsequent experience after conversion. Speaking in tongues follows as evidence of the filling of the Spirit. Mennonites believe that the Holy Spirit comes into the life of a person at the time of conversion and there is no need for a separate experience. MPM missionaries had a hard time accepting Pentecostalism. Peter Fast, a teacher at Loon Straits from 1956-1958, wrote an unpublished paper about MPM and its workers. Fast opined that Andres applied too much pressure on the people at Pine Dock and Anama Bay to convert and to conform to Mennonite beliefs, when they had already been influenced by Pentecostal missionaries. Apparently Andres insisted that the Anama Bay Christians should break all connections with Pentecostalism, and were to attend only meetings held in the Andres home. Fast, 8-9, 18.

faith the Islanders professed to have.[340] He did not think that they had true faith in Jesus Christ that expressed itself in daily life. Unrau and the Board thought of the Islanders as nominal Christians, "pagan at heart."[341] Most of the adults were Anglican church members, but Unrau felt that they had never experienced personal salvation and so they lived ungodly lives. Many of the men drank home brew.[342] Church and Sunday school attendance was good, but some older people (*alte Gesellen*) would not come. When Unrau asked them about their spiritual condition (*Herzenstellung*) they replied that they were not pagans, that Christians did not live according to their beliefs anyway, and that Unrau's efforts would be fruitless.[343]

Probably because of his lack of education and experience, Unrau was rigid and uncompromising in his methods at Matheson Island. When, during his first months there, he learned that the teacher was not planning to have a Christmas program at the school, he decided that there should be a Sunday school Christmas program. Although he had arrived less than three months earlier, he insisted that the program should be planned and performed according to his format. He wrote that, for that first Christmas, they were "creating new traditions" for themselves and the Islanders. Unrau did not have access to English Christian

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[340]Unrau 61.

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Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly Review (July 1957): 6. In a trip report, unsigned but likely by Henry Gerbrandt written in December 1949, the writer says: "*Die Leute sind noch nicht bekehrt. Der Satan wird sie nicht so leicht los lassen*" (The people are not yet converted. Satan will not let go of them easily). MHC, Vol. 352, *Matheson Island Reise Bericht*, December 1948.

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MHC, Volume 280, "*Etwas ueber unsere Arbeit beim See Winnipeg*" by Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Unrau. No date.

[343]

MHC, Volume 280, Jake and Trudie Unrau to "*Lieber Bruder in dem Herrn*," 7 December 1948.

recitations or dialogues, so he planned that the children would recite memorized Bible verses and sing Christmas carols. When Mrs. Charles Settee asked, "Why don't you want Western songs on the program?" Unrau replied that no Western music would be allowed because "we cannot serve two masters...we wish all people would serve the one master, Jesus Christ our Savior." Part of Unrau's concern was that previous Christmas programs at the school had been followed by dances that sometimes ended in violence and tragedy. Unrau's efforts to replace the school program with what in his opinion was better resulted in some disappointments-- the children were unhappy that there would be no Santa Claus (Unrau did not permit it). "Oh, that these people would learn to celebrate Christmas in the correct way" wrote Unrau to the Board. According to Unrau's correspondence with the Board, the Sunday school Christmas program he planned for 1948 did not materialize because the children could not memorize so many verses and songs in the short time remaining until Christmas. Yet in his book, he writes that the Christmas program in 1948 was a great success.[344]

Unrau was inflexible in his form of preaching; he did not match his style to his new audience but continued to preach loudly and at length, as was common among southern Manitoba Mennonites. This style of preaching was a shock to the people of Matheson Island who were accustomed to Anglican ministers. They could not understand why Unrau, who spoke in a normal voice during the week, would suddenly adopt a loud, dynamic voice for preaching. Unrau preached against playing cards, make-up, dancing, and women wearing overalls–things he had observed the people doing during the week. This legalism brought hurt

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MHC, Volume 280, File Jacob M. Unrau, Unrau to "Lieber Bruder im Herrn" 20 December 1948; 3 January 1949. See also Unrau 53. The discrepancy here is likely a result of reliance on memory. Unrau wrote his book in 1996, in hindsight. He may have remembered a second or third Christmas as the first Christmas. See also Jake and Trudie Unrau to "*Lieber Bruder in dem Herrn,*" 7 December 1948.

and pain to the people who thought of themselves as Christians.[345] Unrau left very little room for dialogue. One day, he was in a boat on the lake with a man who wanted to have a serious conversation with Unrau but wanted to share a bottle of whiskey first. Unrau threw the bottle into the lake, whereupon the man lost all desire for discussion.[346]

Unrau and the MPM Board were also rigid in their views about baptism. The question of baptism had arisen earlier when J.W. Schmidt and D.H. Loewen visited Matheson Island in July, 1948 to see if they should establish a mission there. Some parents asked these men to baptize their infants, as Anglicans did. The MPM representatives explained that Mennonites did not baptize infants because there was no "biblical foundation" for such a practice. They would have a child dedication instead, as this was scriptural according to Matthew 19:13-14 where Jesus blessed the children when parents brought them to him.[347]

The accepted form of baptism in the Bergthaler Church was pouring.[348] In the spring of 1950, Merna Kirkness, daughter of store-keeper Ed Kirkness, requested baptism from Unrau, to his great joy. He had many questions for J.W. Schmidt, Board Chairman of MPM. When should the baptism take place? Should Board members be present? Should Merna have

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[345]von Gunten, 310.

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Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002. Gerbrandt, in hindsight, said Unrau would have done better to have a few sips.

[347]MHC, Vol. 352, "Report of our trip to Matheson Island, July 12-16, 1948.

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This baptism, the traditional Bergthal and General Conference form, consisted of pouring water on an individual's head "thereby signifying that individual's spiritual cleansing or washing." The baptismal candidate took catechism classes in the months preceding baptism. In immersion baptism, the form used by Pentecostals, the individual was submerged in a body of water such as a river or a lake signifying "the believer's spiritual death, burial, and resurrection" after giving a personal testimony to the church. See Regehr, 218.

baptismal instructions first, perhaps for a year, or should she be baptized immediately? Unrau favored the latter. Then in May, Unrau sadly reported that although Merna had originally wanted the form of her baptism to be pouring, now she wanted to be immersed. Soon after that, Unrau met Jake Fehr, skipper of the *Pentecostal Gospel Boat*, at Calvary Temple in Winnipeg. The men talked about Merna's baptism in a congenial manner, but Fehr said that God had commanded him to preach and baptize and he must be obedient. Merna was baptized at the Pentecostal summer camp at Ninette and then went to a Saskatoon Bible School recommended by Fehr. Unrau commented: "We hope that God can have the pre-eminence in the work here on Matheson and not what any party might teach which is a wind of doctrine."[349] Unrau's letters to Schmidt leave the impression that he was in a real dilemma and that he was perplexed about what was the right way to proceed. Yet his description of Pentecostalism as "a wind of doctrine" suggests that he thought Pentecostals were not genuine Christians.

In December of 1951, Schmidt suggested that Unrau should organize a Mennonite Church at Matheson Island. Earlier that year, Unrau had conducted a communion service, usually open only to church members. Besides the missionaries and teachers, four local people had participated, one being Mrs. Gilbert Kirkness. Yet when Unrau spoke to her about baptism as a prerequisite for church membership, Mrs. Kirkness replied, "We do not believe as you do." How could a church be organized if the Christians refused to be baptized in the

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MHC, Volume 280, Unrau to *Liebe Brueder im Herrn,"* 3 January 1949; Trudie and Jacob Unrau to *Lieber Bruder Schmidt,"* 7 March 1950; Mr. and Mrs. Jacob M. Unrau to Schmidt, 3 May 1950; Jake Unrau to Brother Schmidt, 2 June 1950; Unrau to Schmidt, 28 September 1950.

traditional Bergthaler way? Jake and Trudie Unrau concluded that Matheson Island believers were not ready to form a church.[350]

Ten years after MPM began its work at Matheson Island, the Islanders were still not ready for an organized church. There was opposition to the word "Mennonite" although those who attended meetings were called "Mennonites" by those who did not attend.[351] In 1965, the Mission Board brought to the Canadian Conference a resolution on baptism which was unanimously carried. It read:

> In view of the ongoing discussion at Matheson Island on the mode of baptism and that it has been impossible to convince the Matheson Island Christians of the mode of baptism employed by our conference and that a considerable number of people have been baptized by immersion in past years by the Baptists and Pentecostals and that six Christians are again asking for baptism by immersion....the Board gives permission to the Matheson Island group to determine its own mode of baptism.[352]

However, it seems that the resolution came too late for Matheson Island, because a Mennonite church was never organized there.

Unrau also visited the Ojibwa at the Bloodvein Reserve. On his first contact, he found that "all the people were very drunk and don't know the Lord Jesus." Chief Henry Benson spoke no English, so Unrau had to speak to him through his son. Unrau realized that it would be difficult to find a reliable interpreter. On a subsequent visit, however, he found that Alfred Cook could speak English. Cook knew the Bible well, had grown up in a Protestant home, but was now a Roman Catholic. Cook, who later became chief, welcomed Unrau's visits to

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MHC, Volume 280, Unrau to Schmidt, 5 February 1951; Unrau to Schmidt, 17 December 1951. Very likely Mrs. Kirkness had been baptized as an infant.

351 *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1958): 149.

352 *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1965): 17-18.

Bloodvein. Yet as Unrau continued his visits to Matheson Island's surrounding areas--Loon Straits, Pine Dock, Bloodvein, and Rabbit Point–he felt his inadequacies increasingly.[353]

Unrau was in favor of some holistic practical efforts to help the people. For example, at Matheson Island, he had a plan to grow potatoes for local needs on an acre of land that he had rented, because potatoes were very expensive. However, the board criticized his efforts because they wanted him to "stick to preaching the Gospel." Unrau did not begin the potato project.[354]

In 1957, after nine years of continuous service, the Unrau family left Matheson Island and began a mission at Manigotagan and the nearby Hole River [Hollow Water] reserve. Manigotagan people were either Roman Catholic or Anglican. One of Unrau's major goals was to establish Mennonite churches. The first MPM church to be formed was the Grace Mennonite Church at Manigotagan. This church came into being when Unrau baptized Hannes and Winnie

Bell from nearby Bisset and Patricia Unrau, his eldest daughter. Jake and Trudie Unrau, their daughter, and the Bells formed the nucleus of the church in the beginning of 1960.[355]

According to Trudie Unrau's memories, their goal was to replace traditional cultures and religions with civilization and Christianity.[356] However, traditional cultures and religions

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[353] Unrau 52-57, 60. See also MHC, Volume 280, Jake and Trudie Unrau to *"Liebe Brueder,"* 4 April 1949, Jake and Trudie Unrau to *"Lieber Bruder Schmidt,"* 11 May 1949. Chief Benson was very ill and subsequently Alfred Cook became the chief.

[354] Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002. See also Unrau 58.

[355] Unrau, 78. See also *Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (1960), 94 and (1961): 97.

[356] Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002.

had been disrupted long before the Unraus came to the North. Manigotagan people were Anglican or Catholic, and the Unraus were attempting to replace these denominations with the Mennonite brand of faith. Neill and Edith von Gunten, from their twenty-first century advantage of hindsight, observe that Mennonite missionaries did not come to their mission stations as "empty vessels." They came with "cultural baggage" that caused some pain and hurt to the people to whom they ministered.

> They came with their own set of perceptions, values and faith understandings that were shaped by their background, culture, religious understandings and past experiences. It is not surprising that some of these influences...clashed with the very different backgrounds, cultures, experiences and practices of the Islanders.[357]

MPM missionaries, their board, and their constituency had good intentions but their lack of understanding of other cultures and their unequivocal confidence that they brought God and the truth to peoples who were without God often provoked the resistance of people who were already members of a mainline church or who were attracted to Pentecostalism.

Unrau and Change

At Manigotagan, Unrau relaxed his views somewhat. For example, he did not think the use of drums at Hole River was necessarily wrong. Witchcraft (sometimes called sorcery), however, he considered sinful because it caused harm to the people. Overall he did not want Native Christians to retain their own culture, though he leaned more toward acceptance than did the MPM Board.

Unrau was increasingly interested in a holistic approach that "combined social programs with evangelical preaching and pastoral work." The Mennonite constituency did not understand this approach, but Unrau was convinced that he should present "a whole gospel" to

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[357]von Gunten, 308.

minister to "the whole person."[358] At Manigotagan, Unrau, together with the Manitoba Government Cooperative Branch and the Manigotagan and Hole River men, organized the Wanipigow Producers Cooperative, which helped its members to get better prices for fish, pulp, and berries. Unrau put his efforts into the Cooperative because he had come to believe that "genuine ministry involved caring for the whole person: body and soul," and also because he thought that if the people controlled their own community affairs, they were more likely to gain confidence to form an indigenous church.[359] Some constituency members criticized Unrau's involvement in the Wanipigow Cooperative because they thought members of a Cooperative were communists.[360] The MPM Board grappled with the issue of holistic ministry. Salvation of the soul was most important, they thought, yet as Gerbrandt wrote: "...the Gospel must be practical. It must apply to the whole man and must have a solution to his problems."[361]

When the Manigotagan Christians built a chapel, they painted it brown because they loved the song, "Little Brown Church in the Wildwood." The Unraus accepted the idea but George Groening, MPM Board Chairman, objected because Mennonite churches should be white.[362] Apparently the Board and constituency were more rigid than Unrau. Because they

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[358]Unrau, 84.

[359]Unrau, 81.

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Unrau, 83. Mennonites who came to Canada in the 1920s and 1950s were sometimes suspicious of cooperatives, since they had worked on cooperative farms for the Communists in Russia. They could not easily differentiate between those Russian farms and Coops in Canada.

[361]*Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly Review* (July 1957): 7.

[362]Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002.

had less contact with the people, they did not see the reasons behind some of their missionary's views.

The Unrau family left Manigotagan in 1965 after which Unrau took some courses at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. In 1967 they moved to Selkirk to minister to northern people who had relocated. At Selkirk, Unrau began to note "inherent racism " and discrimination against vulnerable Native people. In 1972, he attended the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council in Montana. Unrau wrote:

> At these meetings I was impressed by the way Indian and European cultures had come together to create new expressions of the body of Christ Jesus. This gave me a new vision of what it takes to truly become God's people.[363]

Unrau's words indicated his changed attitude. No longer was he concerned about replacing Native culture. He stated that the two cultures together could interact to produce something new that was just as pleasing to God as traditional Mennonite methods and ideologies. At the same conference, Unrau became aware of the American General Conference Mennonite missions to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi that had begun almost one hundred years earlier. Unrau's further education at Canadian Mennonite Bible College may have accounted for his changed attitudes.

In Unrau's book, written in 1996, he relates that when he and his family first sailed to Matheson Island on the *S.S. Keenora* in October 1948 they saw a group of Indians on the shore, preparing their lunch. While observing them, Unrau realized that he would have a difficult time adjusting to these people. In 1996, he acknowledged that he had "little appreciation for other religious expressions" at that time. Forty-eight years later, he wrote:

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[363]Unrau, 93. More will be said about the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council below.

"Now I can acknowledge freely that Indian values, spirituality and lifestyles have had a profound influence on my own spiritual formation."[364]

Henry Neufeld

In January 1953, Jake Unrau, then living at Matheson Island, visited the Ojibwa at Pauingassi. Jacob Owen, a young trapper, told Unrau that ninety-three persons lived at Pauingassi and that, in future, it would become a reserve separate from Little Grand Rapids. Although there were twenty-three school age children, the government had no school at Pauingassi because it was still considered a part of Little Grand Rapids. The Catholics, who had a station at Little Grand Rapids, were trying to gain a foothold at Pauingassi, but the people were Protestant and did not want a Catholic mission or school. Luther Schuetze had been the United Church resident missionary at Little Grand Rapids from 1927 to 1938 and had visited Pauingassi often, but there had been no regular minister at Little Grand Rapids since 1938, other than United Church teachers. The United Church Superintendent of Home Missions, C.H. Best, acknowledged that the work at Little Grand Rapids had been mediocre since Schuetze left.[365] Unrau recommended that MPM should begin a school and a mission at Pauingassi.[366]

In 1955, the MPM Board sent Henry and Elna Neufeld to establish a mission station at Pauingassi. Neufeld, originally from Leamington, Ontario, had three years of education at the

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[364]Unrau, 45.

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United Church of Canada: Archives of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario in Winnipeg (UCA), 509/2/2-23, C.H. Best to Rev. M.C. Macdonald, 23 September 1954. See also Luther Schuetze, *Mission to Little Grand Rapids: Life with the Anishinabe 1927-1938* (Vancouver Creative Connections, 2001).

[366]MHC, Volume 280, Unrau to Gerbrandt and Schmidt, 8 January 1953.

Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) in Winnipeg, a college sponsored by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. CMBC offered instruction beyond the level of Bible schools, with courses that could be transferred for credit at American colleges and later at Canadian universities. Theological training at CMBC was "more advanced and academically much more rigorous" than Elim's courses. Missions courses were more practical. Most courses were taught in the English language.[367]

At CMBC, Neufeld met and married Elna Friesen, a certified teacher from Homewood, Manitoba. After their wedding in 1952, they both taught for two years in a two-room school on the Moose Lake Cree reserve, northwest of Lake Winnipeg. During their teaching years at Moose Lake and in 1954 to 1955 at Little Grand Rapids, the Neufelds were intolerant of Anglicans and Catholics. Henry and Elna attended the Anglican church at Moose Lake but were "strongly against" its practices and were not impressed with the minister who, in their opinion, did nothing for the people.[368] Although they had begun to learn the Cree language, they left Moose Lake because they wanted to open a mission which they likely could not do at Moose Lake because the Anglican priest was resident and active there. After a talk with Jake Unrau, the Neufelds asked the MPM Board if they could begin a mission among the Pauingassi Ojibwa.

As a stepping stone to Pauingassi, Henry taught at Little Grand Rapids during the school year of 1954 to 1955. Neufeld was upset that the Roman Catholic priest, who had his headquarters at the south end of the reserve, was visiting Pauingassi, "determined to get the people on his side." In March 1955, he reported that the priest hung rosaries around the

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[367]Regehr, 259-265.

[368]MHC, Volume 362, Elna and Henry Neufeld to Gerbrand, 15 November 1953.

people's necks but when he was gone, the councillor (Jacob Owen?) collected them and brought them to the store to be returned to the priest. In March 1955, he wrote: "I have been very tempted to give him [the priest] such a warning to keep away from the place that he would never forget. He has made such a liar of himself the last while that it is a shame to see such a person around."[369] As at Moose Lake, Neufeld exhibited hostility toward other denominations.

During that year, the Neufelds met some of the Pauingassi Ojibwa when they came to visit at Little Grand Rapids. Neufeld and Alex Owen discussed possibilities for a mission at Pauingassi. Owen told Neufeld that the people did not want to send their children to a Catholic residential school so they wanted a day school on the reserve. Owen "did not like to see things the way they were...no children baptized and no young people married." He said that in the past, the Ojibwa way of life had been adequate, but now their children were entering a different world and they needed to speak the English language in order to get jobs. Only one resident, Jacob Owen, spoke English. Alex Owen asked Neufeld to be their teacher and missionary. In May 1955, the MPM Board agreed to send Henry and Elna Neufeld to Pauingassi.[370]

Neufeld's Initial Attitudes and Methods

Although the MPM Board thought of the Ojibwa as "pagan," they considered themselves United Church members since Luther Schuetze and other Methodist and United Church missionaries had baptized them in the past. They were accustomed to infant baptism rather than Mennonite adult baptism. In December 1954, while Neufeld was teaching at Little

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[369]MHC, Volume 341, Neufeld to Groening, 6 March 1955.

[370]MHC, Vol. 362, Neufeld to Gerbrandt, 2 February 1955. See also Henry and Elna Neufeld, 11.

Grand Rapids, George Bouchie, a Little Grand Rapids Ojibwa, wrote to C.H. Best, Superintendent of Mission, United Church:

> Dear Sir:
> I am writing to you today to let you know that, that I want to know why they don't baptized the babies when the baby is born. It's been two years now and please let me know why the teachers don't baptized the babies here at Little Grand. I just don't like that thats why I am writing to you. They are quite a few babies here have to be baptized and they don't. And please let me know why. I would be very glad to get answer from you soon.[371]

In response to Bouchie's letter, Best wrote to Neufeld inquiring whether Neufeld would be open to baptizing infants and telling him that it was "quite all right" to do so. Neufeld replied: "As far as baptizing children is concerned we feel it would be very wrong for us to have anything to do with it."[372]

On March 20, 1955 Johnny Kehler, a farmer-pilot, flew Henry Gerbrandt and Jake Unrau to Little Grand Rapids and, together with Neufeld, they visited Pauingassi for the first time. On March 22, the Little Grand Rapids chief and councillors sent another letter to Best as follows:

> Dear Sir
> I am writing a few lines to let you know we are all well all band. L.G. Rapids united church and I let you know two missionary came here reserve one medicion Island one I don't know. He use plane come here. All people be happy to baptise his baby and chiefs councillars ask him this two missionary too baptised baby he said no let on after grown up he said all people he cannot like this missionary anymore. Another thing I

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UCA, 509/2/2-7-23, George Bouchie to C.H. Best, 14 December 1954. A list of Pauingassi residents included a family by the name of Boushie, perhaps related to George Bouchie. The name is spelled in various ways. It likely goes back to the French name Boucher. See UCA, 509/2/2-7-23, petition of Little Grand Rapids Indians to Rev. C.H. Best, 14 May 1952.

372

UCA, 509/2/2-7-23, Best to Neufeld, 15 December 1954; Best wrote that if Neufeld had conscience scruples about infant baptism, the United Church would respect that as well. Neufeld to Best, 10 January 1955.

> am going to ask you too send here kind of missionary to come here to baptised baby I was meeting about this.[373]

Both in Matheson Island and in Pauingassi, the people seemed confused about what kind of missionary they had called. At Matheson Island, the people expected an Anglican missionary instead of a Mennonite, and at Pauingassi they seem to have expected a United Church missionary who would baptize their babies. MPM made much of going to the various locations only upon an invitation from the people. Yet, the people at Matheson Island and Pauingassi did not seem to know that they had called Mennonite missionaries.

Neufeld's method of beginning the Pauingassi mission was to build a complex infrastructure. His letters are full of descriptions of work with saw mills, motors, power plants, lumber, and other building materials. He was immediately engrossed in erecting a mission house, a school, and a chapel. Apparently the Ojibwa were *angenehm ueberrascht* (pleasantly surprised) at the pile of boards the Mennonite men from the south sawed in one week with the saw mill they had brought.[374] Henry Gerbrandt, in hindsight, remarked that in building stations, MPM followed the American General Conference example where buildings were the

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UCA, 509/2/2-7-23, Little Grand Rapids Chief and Councillors (Paul Keeper, Katagas Keeper, Willie Bouchie, William B. Keeper) to Best, 22 March 1955. See also Henry and Elna Neufeld, 8. The reference to medicion Island likely means Matheson Island, where Unrau was stationed in 1955. Johnny Kehler and Henry Gerbrandt were from the Altona area.

374

MHC, Volume 362, *Pauingassi Missions Station*, published in Altona, Manitoba, 1958. Indeed, they were likely astonished at the modern equipment and the productive, time-conscious Mennonites. Several Mennonite men from southern Manitoba worked at construction in Pauingassi for a short time.

"visible mission."[375] Buildings demonstrated progress: something was happening; projects were being accomplished, even though conversions were slow in coming.

Neufeld was troubled that the people could easily get government assistance and become dependent. He himself charged ten to fifteen cents for articles of clothing donated by southern Mennonites. When the people received too many handouts they did not go out on the trapline, Neufeld observed, and idleness led to drunkenness, and sometimes violence.[376] The tone of Neufeld's correspondence is sometimes impatient. For example when a baby was ill, Neufeld and the nurse both advised the parents to have the baby flown out to a hospital. They refused because they thought the baby was not seriously ill; after a few days, when the plane was not available, the baby died. Neufeld found the situation depressing. He wrote:

> The thing is the people have the idea that the plane will and should come and pick them up any time they have a slight upset stomach or something like that, but when they are to put forth a little effort to go and see the Dr. during his monthly visit to L.G.[Little Grand Rapids], they just refuse.[377]

Neufeld's economy, time consciousness and schedules were not yet attuned to the culture of the Ojibwa and their ways of making decisions. The problem of what he saw as Ojibwa dependence on the missionary and his conveniences surfaced early at Pauingassi, as the above example demonstrates.

Matheson Island and Pauingassi differed with respect to ethnicity, language, and the forms of baptism and education that the people were accustomed to. Pauingassi had no school

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Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002. Mennonites inherited a strong Protestant work ethic. They did not feel comfortable without something visible to demonstrate that they had been industrious, ingenious, resourceful, diligent, and thrifty. Mission complexes were also built quickly at overseas mission locations.

[376]MHC, Volume 362, Henry and Elna to Gerbrandt, 16 February 1958.

[377]MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Groening, 2 April 1958.

before the Neufelds arrived, whereas Matheson Island had a school at least since 1918.[378] Unrau had language problems at Matheson Island because his language of the soul was German. Neufeld's language problem was that the Pauingassi people spoke Ojibwe. Only one Pauingassi resident could speak limited English, and he was sometimes away on the trapline or drunk.[379] Henry and Elna quickly decided that they wanted to learn the Ojibwe language, not only because Henry would rather preach without an interpreter but because they wanted to send the message: "What you have is okay. We want to know your language and your culture."[380] To learn the language more quickly, Henry and Elna spent the summer of 1955 at the Summer School of Linguistics at Caronport, Saskatchewan. The MPM Board recognized the importance of mastering the language of the people because the translator, with his limited knowledge of English and of the Bible, could translate words but not spiritual concepts.[381] However, Ojibwe was an especially difficult language to learn because Bibles and dictionaries were available only in Cree. By 1963, however, both Henry and Elna were fluent Ojibwe speakers with the ability to converse and preach in that language.

In school, Neufeld was less rigid about language than officers of the Department of Indian Affairs desired. They did not want missionaries and teachers to learn Ojibwe because they wanted teachers to speak only English and to prevent children from speaking Native

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[378] Colin Douglas Street, a Methodist teacher, taught at the Matheson Island day school from 1918 to 1922. See von Gunten, 285.

[379] MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Groening, 15 January 1961.

[380] Henry and Elna Neufeld, 50. See also MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Gerbrandt, 5 December 1955.

[381] MHC, Volume 362, 1957 trip report, author unknown.

languages. Although Neufeld taught in English, he encouraged the children to speak Ojibwe in all informal settings such as school recesses. As he taught the children English, he tried to learn Ojibwe from them.[382] Neufeld was also flexible about school hours. When families went out on the trapline, he thought it was important that the children go with their parents even though that meant missing school.[383]

Neufeld was at Pauingassi for eleven years before three Ojibwa were converted and baptized. In February 1966, Neufeld baptized Jacob and Lucy Owen and St. John Owen and they formed the nucleus of the Pauingassi Mennonite Church.[384] Perhaps the people's confusion about differences surrounding baptism played a part in the length of time that elapsed before they were converted and baptized.[385] It must be said, in Neufeld's defense, that he had been forthright with the Pauingassi people about the Mennonite beliefs about baptism from the beginning. When he first met with Alex Owen, Neufeld explained to him that Mennonites baptized only adults upon confession of faith. At that time, Owen wondered whether Mennonites were a different religion from the United Church.[386]

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[382]Henry and Elna Neufeld, 12-13.

[383]*Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (April 1956): 11.

[384]*Bulletin* (12 April): 5.

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The three converts were St. John Owen who struggled with the fear that he was under the spell of sorcery, Jacob Owen who was "involved with dreams and spirits," and Jacob's wife Lucy. MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Wiebe, 5 January 1966.

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MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Gerbrandt, 2 February 1955. See also Henry and Elna Neufeld, 8-10.

Neufeld and Change

Early during Neufeld's time at Pauingassi, the Board decided that visual aids could be used during sermons, and religious pictures could be introduced into Ojibwa homes.[387] Thus Neufeld used a different type of communication from Unrau's southern Manitoba method of loud preaching at Matheson Island.

Henry and Elna Neufeld did not condemn all different cultural practices and beliefs as "heathen." The Ojibwa believed that pointing at Manitominis (a small island) would bring a storm to the lake and that bundles of animal bones should be hung in trees so that the next trapping season would be good. The Neufelds commented, after three years at Pauingassi. that these Ojibwa practices were different from Mennonite ways, but not necessarily evil. "We must not forget that we were brought up...under different circumstances." About much drumming they commented that the drum could be "classed as a type of music...and in itself considered good."[388]

However, Neufeld was concerned with the drinking that often accompanied drumming in the 1950s. Drinking (usually of home-brew) sometimes led to violence.[389] Neufeld and the Board were also concerned about the continuing belief at Pauingassi that someone who held a grudge against another person could call upon an "evil spirit" to inflict sickness upon that person. In 1960, Neufeld drew the attention of the Board to St. John Owen's problem, which

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[387]MHC, Volume 362, "Pauingassi Trip Report," author unknown, 1957.

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Henry and Elna Neufeld, " Customs and Beliefs," *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (June 1958): 4.

[389]

Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly (June 1958): 4. See also MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Groening, 15 January 1961.

Owen attributed to another person's grudge against him. Neufeld described the affliction as a "spell that was drummed on" St John some time ago. Gerbrandt's advice to Neufeld was that he and many others should pray for Owen and show him from the New Testament that Jesus had power over evil spirits and that Jesus' power was still available if Owen would accept his forgiveness in faith. Neufeld certainly did not change his mind that the Pauingassi people were sinners who needed to repent and accept Christ. However, wrote Neufeld, the Ojibwa were self-righteous and did not think of themselves as sinners. Rather, they were "bound to the devil more than ever through the witch doctor." [390] Neufeld's view that sorcery was harmful and sinful did not change over time. As he learned to speak and understand Ojibwe, he found that the belief in *Zauberei* (conjuring) was even stronger than he had thought at first.[391]

By 1965, Neufeld and the Board realized that they needed to cooperate with the United Church whose clergy had been at Little Grand Rapids for many years before MPM came to the area. This change may have come about when Menno Wiebe became Executive Secretary of MPM. Wiebe wrote: "One of the concerns that Henry and I had was that we do not try to upset or depreciate the years of effort made by the United Church."[392]

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MHC, Volume 362, Gerbrandt to Neufeld, 17 March 1960. See also MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Groening, 16 January 1961; Henry and Elna to "Dear Praying Friends," January, 1961; Neufeld to Groening, 28 March 1962.

391

Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook (1960): 95. Neufeld was encountering an Ojibwa pattern of spiritual belief and practice documented over a wide area. Some people had, through dreams and visions, spiritual powers and gifts that they could use in good ways and also in bad. See A. Irving Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History*, ed. Jennifer S.H. Brown (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1992), 88-91. See also Jennifer S.H. Brown, "A Place in Your Mind for Them All": Chief William Berens," in *Being and Becoming Indian*, ed J.A. Clifton (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989), 215-217.

[392]MHC, Volume 362, report by Menno Wiebe, 3 August 1965.

Neufeld and some Pauingassi residents had been holding Sunday afternoon services in Little Grand Rapids since 1959. Since the United Church presence at Little Grand Rapids had been weak for years, their Mission Office asked the Mennonites to take over in 1965. However, some of the Ojibwa wanted a United Church missionary rather than a Mennonite. The reasons they gave were that Mennonites did not baptize children and that their grandfathers and fathers had belonged to the United Church. Sam Bouchie, a Little Grand Rapids resident in whose home Neufeld had formerly held Sunday school, closed his home to the Mennonites in 1965 and accused missionaries of preaching only for money. He said that the United Church had no business asking Mennonites to take over the services at Little Grand Rapids. Since the reserve belonged to the residents they should decide who came to minister to them. Clearly the Little Grand Rapids Ojibwa wanted to be in control of their own spiritual affairs and felt they were not being consulted about changes.[393]

Correspondence between the United Church and Neufeld demonstrates a high degree of cooperation throughout this time, a change from Neufeld's earlier harsh judgements of the Anglicans and Catholics at Moose Lake and Little Grand Rapids. Neufeld, however, was unhappy when a United Church minister visited at Little Grand Rapids and baptized babies after the United Church had asked Neufeld to take responsibility for that congregation. During the same visit, the United Church minister chose four church elders to work with Neufeld, most of whom Neufeld knew to be heavy drinkers.[394] Both the United Church and the Mennonites eventually concluded that the arrangement of having Neufeld in charge at Little

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[393] MHC, Volume 362, N.K Campbell (Home Missions Secretary of the Manitoba Missions Committee of the United Church) to Rev. J.C. Reid (United Church minister at Bissett), 25 October 1965. See also Neufeld to Campbell, 20 November, 1965.

[394] MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Wiebe, 13 January 1967.

Grand Rapids under United Church supervision was unsatisfactory to both parties. In the summer of 1967, in response to the Little Grand Rapids people's wishes, the United Church appointed to the community a missionary who would baptize babies.[395]

When the north end of Little Grand Rapids reverted back to the United Church, St. John Owen and other converts wanted to hold services on the south end, which had been served by the Roman Catholics but had no resident priest. Menno Wiebe, Executive Secretary of Mennonite Pioneer Mission, reported that

> the young church at Pauingassi has an almost New Testament-like desire to spread the good news wherever it is possible. Unfortunately somehow the denominationalism tends to hinder this seemingly genuine spirit of missions. At the same time we are faced with the realism of denominationalism which cannot be overlooked anymore when we advance in missions.[396]

Greater cooperation with other denominations and with the people at Little Grand Rapids became evident from 1967 on. To plan a ministry to the south end of the reserve, Menno Wiebe and two MPM representatives from Winnipeg traveled to Pauingassi to consult with Douglas McMurtry (United Church secretary), Father Robideaux of the Roman Catholic diocese, Henry Neufeld, Little Grand Rapids Chief Leveque, and other Ojibwa representatives. The United Church and the Roman Catholic representatives gave their consent for a Mennonite Sunday afternoon ministry at the south end.

The presence of both Little Grand Rapids and Pauingassi residents at this gathering signaled their growing claim to a voice in their own affairs. The Mennonites listened and took them seriously. Wiebe's report noted:

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[395]MHC, Volume 362, McMurtry to Wiebe, 30 June 1967.

[396]MHC, Volume 362, memo from Menno Wiebe to the Mission Board of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (25 September 1967), 10.

> Our response to Chief Leveque was that we would follow them up as far as their invitation went. Both Henry Neufeld and Spoat [sic] Owen responded favorably to this invitation and promised that they would come as regularly as possible....John Joseph Leveque asked for our patience particularly in learning of the songs from the songbook, which would be unfamiliar to the new group.[397]

Dialogue was taking place between MPM and the Ojibwa. The Pauingassi converts wanted to share their Christianity with Little Grand Rapids people and MPM listened to them and to the people to whom they wished to minister.

According to Wiebe, Neufeld had taken a "hard line" when he first came to Pauingassi, an attitude that could potentially "break relationships." After thirteen years at Pauingassi, he had adapted until he now had the confidence of the people and "insight into the local way of life" so that relationships were consistently improving. Wiebe concluded that Neufeld's method of both preaching and facilitating "community development" was a good method to adopt among Indian peoples.[398]

Many years later, Wiebe stated that when Henry and Elna Neufeld first came to Pauingassi they thought they had the truth in a four-cornered box and were bringing it to the Ojibwa. They might round off the corners a little, but otherwise the truth would remain intact.[399] As the Neufelds interacted with the Ojibwa, they changed their minds. In retrospect, Neufeld explained: "We do not have a monopoly on God. He was at Pauingassi before we came. We went in with everything to teach, thinking they had nothing to give. But we

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[397]MHC, Volume 362, "Report on Little Grand Rapids Developments," October 11-14, 1967.

[398]Memo, 11.

[399]Menno Wiebe, interview with Alvina Block, 30 January 2000.

changed our minds. We learned from them."[400] As the Neufelds began to listen and to engage in dialogue, their attitudes changed. Learning became a two-way process as genuine interaction took place.

By the late 1960s, the missionaries at the various MPM stations were beginning to listen to the people. Whereas at first they came as bringers of truth to people who they thought had nothing to give, they were changing their attitudes. The *Bulletin*, a paper published by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, reported that "at Pauingassi the Henry Neufelds have discovered that the missionary must work with the people rather than for them." When the Neufelds took a vacation in 1967, the interim missionary, Harry Dyck, was impressed that the new converts took responsibility for church services and preached some sermons themselves.[401]

In 1968, there were more Native converts and more signs of Native autonomy. When Neufeld returned from a trip to Cross Lake, he found that five more individuals had come to faith. St. John Owen and a teacher from the Red Lake Ontario Mennonite Bible School had counseled them while Neufeld was away.[402] Neufeld arranged a meeting of the five Pauingassi church members to welcome and hear from the new Christians. At this meeting, St. John Owen took over, asking each new convert to give a testimony and then asking each church

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Henry Neufeld, interview with David Balzer, 30 January 2000 on "Connecting Points," CFAM.

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MHC, Volume 362, "Report of Summer Replacement at Pauingassi from June 23-August 11, 1967" by B. Harry Dyck.

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These were people from Northern Light Gospel Mission, later named Impact North Ministries, a mission of the Mennonite Church sometimes called "old Mennonites." They had approximately 14 mission stations among the Ojibwa of northern Ontario.

member to shake the new converts' hands and encourage them. The number of church members grew from 5 to 21 in 1968. But Neufeld showed no signs of arrogance. "To be able to guide this group along is almost a frightening thought," he wrote to Wiebe.[403]

By the fall of 1968, there was talk of the Pauingassi church operating on its own. However, Neufeld provided so many community services, such as a two-way radio and transportation, that he could hardly think of leaving the people without these conveniences. Yet Henry and Elna were becoming weary because the people exerted pressure on them to provide these services.[404] They thought perhaps they should be resident missionaries at Little Grand Rapids to put some distance between them and Pauingassi and yet be available for consultation. When Neufeld first spoke of the move to St. John and Spoot Owen, they were "struck with fear," but thought they could take over if Neufeld would stay for two more years.[405] In a few weeks, St. John said that his initial distress had now changed to peace. He felt that with the help of the Holy Spirit, the Pauingassi Christians could take charge of the church. Charlie George Owen, a band councillor, thought someone should take the Neufelds' place since the band needed the means of communication that Neufeld had brought with him. David Owen expressed fear that few would come to church after the Neufelds left.[406] In order to remain available, Neufeld together with the Ojibwa built a residence for a Mennonite missionary (perhaps himself) at the south end of Little Grand Rapids, but Henry and Elna and their family never actually lived in it.

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[403]MHC, Volume 362, Neufeld to Wiebe, 12 March 1968.

[404]MHC, Volume 499, Neufeld to Froese, 8 October 1968.

[405]MHC, Volume 499, Neufeld to Froese, 22 January 1969.

[406]MHC, Volume 499, memo from Froese to the Board of Missions, 20 March 1969.

In 1969, Pauingassi converts became even more assertive in witnessing to their own people. St. John Owen, together with Neufeld, visited Bloodvein, where St. John boldly testified about his understanding of his personal faith. The Bloodvein Christians had been strongly influenced by Pentecostals who stressed immersion baptism. Perhaps Pentecostalism held a special appeal for the Ojibwa because, like the Pentecostals, they placed importance in visions and dreams. Pentecostals also clapped and jumped in their worship services, a more lively approach than the Mennonite services. At this time, the Pauingassi Christians endorsed the forms in which Mennonites expressed their Christianity rather than the Pentecostal ways which were attractive to the Bloodvein people.[407]

Ike Froese became the Executive Director of MPM in 1970. Froese and Menno Wiebe visited the Neufelds and the Pauingassi Christians to assess whether it was time for the Neufelds to leave. Froese observed that in the past, the Board of Missions had been "blind to mission ripeness" and so had "missed making definite shifts toward more native responsibility simply because [they] ignored or did not recognize the signs." He remarked that "further riping [sic] in such cases involves spoilage." Wiebe, Froese, and the Board had a difficult time deciding whether the Pauingassi Christians were ready to take over their own church. In the end, they sent Vic and Norma Funk who stayed until 1975 in an advisory capacity.[408] Funk took a low profile in the church. He preached at worship services and led Bible studies only when the Native leaders asked him to do so. He did not speak Ojibwe and was dependent on Jacob Owen to interpret for him.

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[407]MHC, Volume 499, Neufeld to Froese, 10 February 1969.

[408]Neufeld, 104, 113.

In 1972, Jacob Owen, St. John Owen, Spoot Owen and David Owen were ordained to take leadership positions in the church. The people indicated that they wanted the four men, rather than one, to form the leadership team that would take responsibility for the local Mennonite church. To form a leadership team instead of choosing one leader, was different from traditional Mennonite practice.[409] The four Native leaders arranged services, selected songs, and did most of the preaching and leading in their own language in the following years.

Larry Kehler, an MPM representative, described the Pauingassi Mennonite church thus:

> The church at Pauingassi is developing its own unique style and structure. Some of its practices were introduced by the Henry Neufelds, others have been picked up from missions in northern Ontario and the Lake Winnipeg region. An Apostolic group from Berens River has had considerable influence on the church at Little Grand Rapids, and some of this is now being picked up at Pauingassi. Denominationalism appears to have little appeal to the Indian people. They pick up what they like from various places.[410]

In 1973, Menno Wiebe reported that 32 Christians were participating in communion at this church.[411] Although membership was increasing, there were problems and warning signs of an uncertain future for the Mennonite Church at Pauingassi in the early 1970s. Drunkenness and violence were common. Apostolic and Pentecostal groups from surrounding communities put pressure on Christians in the Lake Winnipeg areas to be rebaptized by immersion, with the promise that if they would go into the water they would become sinless, also in the future. In

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[409] *Bulletin* (26 May 1972): 18.

[410] Menno Wiebe, interview with Alvina Block, 20 December 1998. Larry Kehler, "Larry Kehler reports: Pauingassi" *Bulletin* (28 May 1971): 5 The Apostolic movement became divisive at Pauingassi in the 1970s and later. They were different from the Pentecostals in that they baptized in the name of Jesus only, not in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[411] *Bulletin* (28 May 1971): 3. See also *Bulletin* (28 May 1973): 10.

1971, an Apostolic group from Berens River influenced the people at Little Grand Rapids and their teaching spread to Pauingassi.[412] Henry Neufeld, itinerant minister to Native Ministries churches in the late 1970s and 1980s, visited Pauingassi often, and the church continued in its own eclectic fashion.

The MPM Board and Change

When the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell visited the Pauingassi area in 1932, he felt that he was making "an excursion into the living past" because the Ojibwa up the Berens River were spatially isolated from the rest of Manitoba and less westernized than other Indians. Yet Hallowell thought these people were rich because they retained their traditional culture.[413] In contrast, the MPM Board in 1957 thought that, because of their isolation, the Pauingassi Ojibwa were "as culturally backward as the people in the Amazon jungles of South America" since they had never seen cars, horses, or cows. When the mission board considered the Ojibwa "customs, superstitions, and backwardness," they concluded that mission work with these people was much as it was in "heathen" countries even though the missionary in Pauingassi was only 200 air miles away from Winnipeg.[414] George Groening, Board

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[412] *Bulletin* (28 May 1971): 3.

[413] Hallowell, 8. The Pauingassi Ojibwa had had more contact with traders and missionaries than Hallowell indicated. The Hudson's Bay Company post had been at Little Grand Rapids was in sporadic winter operation since 1801 and opened officially in 1888. See Victor Lytwyn, *The Fur Trade of the Little North: Indians, Pedlars, and Englishmen East of Lake Winnipeg, 1760-1821* (Winnipeg: Rupert's Land Research Centre, 1986), 100.

[414] MHC, Volume 362, "Pauingassi Trip Report," author unknown (likely a board member), 1957. The author of this report probably did not consider Winnipeg children culturally backward because they had never seen a moose, a caribou, or a dogsled. See also MHC, Volume 362, 1958 brochure (in the German language). The words in quotation marks were translated into the nearest correct meaning.

Chairman, wrote that the Pauingassi Ojibwa still practiced witchcraft, although usually in secret. They still feared to offend the witch doctor who could "cast an evil eye" on the offender which they thought could result in death.[415] A pamphlet circulated by the Board stated that the only religion known to the Pauingassi Ojibwa was that which was passed on to them by their "heathen ancestors." This religion the Board called *Aberglauben* (superstition).[416]

After 1965 Menno Wiebe, a trained anthropologist, became the Executive Secretary of MPM. Wiebe was interested in how Native people could become Christians without giving up their own cultures. He asked such questions as, "What happens when an agricultural people, with a progress oriented ethic touches the world of the Algonquian hunters," and "What happens when a Christian theology is imposed upon pre-Christian concepts of God and the world?" [417]

To summarize, by 1980 missionaries Jacob Unrau, Henry Neufeld, and the MPM Board were turning away from their initial judgmental and fundamentalistic attitudes. They were becoming more patient and increasingly willing to listen to the views of the people among whom they lived and even to learn from them, and they were more interested in a holistic approach. They still retained the goal of bringing Christianity to the people and establishing Mennonite churches. However, they had learned not to apply pressure for

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[415]*Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (April 1956): 5.

[416]MHC, Volume 362, *Pauingassi Missions Station*, Altona, Manitoba, 1958.

[417]Menno Wiebe, "Mennonite Pioneer Mission," *Bulletin* (28 May 1973): 11.

conversion as had been done in earlier years.[418] They were also learning to cooperate with mainline Protestant churches. The MPM Board was changing; at least some Board members realized that their earlier superior approach had been wrong.

The next chapter explores developments during the same period at two other MPM stations, Loon Straits and Cross Lake.

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The MPM Board thought that Andres had applied too much pressure towards quick conversion at Anama Bay and Pine Dock and that was why the mission failed to continue in those places. See Peter Fast, 8-9.

Chapter Six

Mennonite Pioneer Mission to Loon Straits and Cross Lake

1955-1980

Loon Straits

During the same years (1954-1956) that MPM began work at Pauingassi, they also opened other stations. Among them was Loon Straits, up the east shore of Lake Winnipeg, 25 miles southeast of Matheson Island. All of the Loon Straits residents were interrelated through marriage. The leading Loon Straits families were the Monkmans. The first known Monkman ancestor was James Monkman (1775-1865) who married Mary Muskegan, a Swampy Cree woman. James came from Whitby, England, was an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, and then became a farmer in the Severn District. His son Andrew settled in the Loon Straits.area around 1897.[419] Andrew's first wife, Nancy Chastelaine, was a Metis woman and his second wife, Elizabeth Whitesand, was a Native women.[420] Andrew and Nancy's son, William Monkman and his wife, Rose Anne Ramsay (of French and Ojibwa descent), had eleven children and they also raised William's brother's five children. Garfield Monkman, who was the spiritual leader at Loon Straits before MPM came, was one of William and Rose Anne's sons.[421] At its peak, around 1959, the population of Loon Straits was approximately 150.[422]

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[419]von Gunten, 485.

[420]
See Kathleen Monkman, 7-8. Monkman does not say whether Elizabeth Whitesand was Ojibwa or Cree.

[421]See Anne Monkman, 1-7 and Kathleen Monkman, 5-16.

[422]Kathleen Monkman, 86.

In 1946 Garfield Monkman married Gladys Thomas, a devout Christian woman who came from Patricia Beach. Her ancestors were Welsh and Scottish, with a grandmother who was a "French half-breed." According to oral tradition, two men from Balsam Bay (near Patricia Beach) walked 35 miles to Selkirk to buy booze for New Year's Eve. Instead, they went to an evangelistic meeting in Selkirk, got saved, and brought back the preacher who was allegedly of Brethren Assemblies persuasion.[423] As a result people at Patricia Beach, among them the Thomas family–ancestors of Gladys Thomas Monkman, were converted. When Gladys Thomas Monkman came to Loon Straits after she married Garfield Monkman in 1946, she immediately began to teach Sunday school and Garfield conducted the Lord's Supper (holy communion).[424]

Kathleen and Anne Monkman's family histories shed light on the spiritual state of the people at Loon Straits before the arrival of MPM workers. Kathleen writes that in the past, before weekly church services were organized, Loon Straits people rested and visited on Sundays. They were happy when missionary speakers came to Loon Straits, starting in 1918, to hold meetings at the schoolhouse. These meetings were always well attended. Jake Unrau from Matheson Island was welcomed when he visited. They were also grateful for Brother Leach, the Oblate priest, who taught at Bloodvein from 1936 to 1965 and visited Loon Straits sometimes.[425]

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Gladys Monkman, interview with Alvina Block, 3 July 2003. Various members of the Thomas family told this story but did not provide a date. Laurie Barth, speaker at the Brethren Assemblies Faith Bible Camp in 2003, also was familiar with this story and thought the Selkirk preacher was from the Brethren Assemblies (more will be said about this group later).

[424]Brethren Assemblies observe the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

[425]See Leach, 54.

In July, 1954 Garfield (Garf) and Gladys Monkman wrote to J.W. Schmidt, Chairman of the MPM Board, requesting a missionary for Loon Straits because the Monkmans had moved to Victoria Beach three months earlier. The letter continued:

> ...our concern is the missionary work there [at Loon Straits]. What we were doing was very small indeed but we were happy to be of this small service to Him. We feel it is God's will that we have come away as we have prayed much about it and we do want to be in His will. Perhaps so someone more fitted for the work in the place someone who is not related to the people will do much more.[426]

In March 1955, Henry Gerbrandt traveled to various places in northern Manitoba and later reported on his trip to the MPM Executive at a meeting held in the Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. At Loon Straits he had met with the Monkmans who were, in his opinion, "sincere, honest Christians." They had asked Gerbrandt for a missionary to continue what they had begun, since they were leaving Loon Straits, at least for a while. Gerbrandt had listened to their faith story and religious beliefs and he told the MPM Executive: "I could not tell them that they were all wrong and we were all right. We will study the Bible together."[427] His statement sounds as though Gerbrandt was certain that after the Loon Straits people were taught by an MPM missionary, they would be persuaded that Mennonites had the right beliefs, and would relinquish their differences in theology. In one of Gerbrandt's later reports he noted

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[426]MHC, Volume 276, Brother and Sister Monkman to Bro. Schmidt, 9 July 1954.

[427]MHC, Volume 352, 31 March 1955. Garf Monkman had been an airplane pilot since 1950, flying medical personnel and missionaries all over the North. In 1954 Monkman had an airplane accident resulting in some physical handicaps. He kept on flying but some people said the accident affected his personality. The Monkmans moved because it was easier for them to make a living at Victoria Beach than at Loon Straits. See Anne Monkman, 30-31.

that the Loon Straits Christians accepted the doctrine of a religious group called Plymouth Brethren but that they did not go by that name.[428]

What Gerbrandt encountered at Loon Straits was a group of Brethren Assemblies, not Plymouth Brethren. Brethren Assemblies had sprung up simultaneously in many places between 1820 and 1830. The largest centers were in Dublin, Ireland and in Plymouth, England with the Plymouth Brethren being only one branch of Brethren Assemblies.[429] Brethren Assemblies came into being as a protest against Catholicism, High Anglicanism, and rigid denominationalism. They maintained that Jesus's death and resurrection should be remembered weekly by observing the Lord's Supper, but that no ordained leader need preside. Ordination was not necessary for clergy, who were lay persons, not paid pastors. Official church membership was not important either. Anyone who was in relationship with Christ, of whatever denominational background, could participate, both by partaking of the elements (not considered a sacrament as with Anglicans and Roman Catholics) and by reading Scripture, singing, or praying.[430]

Into this "Brethren" locality and with little information about their beliefs, MPM sent Jake and Helen Wiebe. Wiebe, teacher at Elim Bible School, with his wife Helen and two children, spent the summers of 1955 to 1957 at Loon Straits. All went well. During this time,

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MHC, Volume 276, report by Henry Gerbrandt to the Executive Committee of the MPM Mission Board, 20 April, 1960.

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See T. Elwood, "The Brethren Movement," *The Harvester* (April 1968): 64. See also William Conard, "Family Snapshots: Plymouth," *Interest* (January 1987): 18.

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See Conard, 18-19. See also Elwood, 64. I attended Faith Bible Camp in July 2003 and 2004, a Brethren Assemblies camp. The materials I have cited were donated by Laurie Barth, the speaker at the adult camp.

MPM reports noted that a new chapel was erected "largely with the help of local Christians,"on Garf Monkman's land and through his initiative.[431] Anne Monkman described the spiritual life of the Loon Straits people after the chapel was erected:

> Their way of life centered around the church. Their sure and total belief in their God developed in them a certain calmness. They believed that their destiny was in His Hands. This belief,
>
> coupled with their sense of good clean fun and rest at the proper times, helped many of them to live to a ripe old age.[432]

The Wiebes did house visitations, held services on Sunday mornings and evenings, and taught crafts for boys and sewing for girls on week day evenings. They reported:

> It is very encouraging to see that two of the Christian women (incidentally the only two Christians here now) are teaching Sunday school. Yes, as for us we know, the Christians at Loon Straits are one hundred percent in the work. That is more than can be said almost anywhere else. These women have to work under great opposition too.[433]

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MHC, Volume 348, Minutes of MPM, 16 January 1957. See also MHC, Volume 4998, letter from Garf Monkman to Orville Andres, 6 September 1964. Monkman wrote that although the chapel belonged to the Loon Straits people, he built it and it was on his land. Gladys Monkman wrote: "Garf built the chapel; he had help from Jake Wiebe, our pastor the summer of 58. There was also some local volunteer labor." Garfield must have come back from Victoria Beach to build the chapel. Wiebe was at Loon Straits in 1956 and 57 so Gladys may have had the year wrong. Gladys Monkman in Kathleen Monkman, 97.

[432]Ann Monkman, 9.

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"Loon Straits," Helen and Jake Wiebe, *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (*MPMQ*) (August 1956): 6-7. Garf and Gladys Monkman had left Loon Straits. "Two of the Christian women" suggests that there were more than two yet the Wiebes went on to say that there were only two. Also, they said the chapel was built with the help of local Christians. It seems strange that there were only two Christians since the whole community had been so enthusiastic about Gladys's Sunday school begun in 1946. See Anne Monkman, 37-38. MPM reports vacillate between calling these people Christians and saying that they were not Christians. None of them were Mennonites, so "Christian" could not have been a gloss for "Mennonite." It is also unclear what the opposition to the Christian women was when, according to Kathleen Monkman, the Loon Straits people were like one big happy family.

Kathleen Monkman wrote about this period:

> I'll never forget the year that Jake and Helen Wiebe came to stay. There were regular Sunday services and Bible studies, a choir ...when they sang with Helen playing on the old pump organ, the love of God in Christ seemed to radiate through it all. They helped all our children spiritually and we adults too. We were like one big family in the community.[434]

In the winters, Mennonite school teachers taught Sunday school. Peter and Vera Fast, who were teachers at Loon Straits in the school year 1956-1957, found that the people were genuinely interested in Sunday school. The Fasts loved the Loon Straits residents and their love was reciprocated.[435] During those years, with the help of the Wiebes in the summer and the Mennonite teachers in the winter, the number of Christians at Loon Straits increased.[436] In 1957, the MPM Board decided to send a full-time missionary couple to Loon Straits.

Edwin Brandt

Edwin Brandt and his family became the resident missionaries at Loon Straits. Brandt was born in 1921 in Altona, Manitoba. Although the spoken language in this southern Manitoba Mennonite community was primarily Low German, Brandt's father was a teacher so the family spoke English in their home. Brandt's parents were members of the Mennonite Brethren church. Brandt completed Grade Eleven at Winkler High School, and then attended Herbert Bible School, a Mennonite Brethren school, for one year. In 1943, he graduated from a three year program at Prairie Bible Institute, Alberta. Prairie Bible Institute, located near Three Hills, was a strict non-denominational school with a strong missions emphasis, attended by persons of many denominational backgrounds. L.E. Maxwell was the founder and principal

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[434]Kathleen Monkman, 126.

[435]"Report from Loon Straits" by Peter and Vera Fast, *MPMQ* (April 1957): 6-7.

[436]*MPMQ* (December 1956): 8. No figures are given.

of this conservative school While Brandt was at the Institute, Principal Maxwell baptized him by immersion. The school had its own church, named the "Tabernacle."

When Brandt married Margaret Enns, who was of Bergthaler background, he left his Mennonite Brethren Conference affiliation to join the Bergthaler church.[437] When the Brandts were at Oxford House, it was Margaret who wrote at least one of the newsletters for the *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly*, on behalf of herself and Edwin, in which she described the area and the people and expressed opinions on the spiritual condition of the Cree. Yet little is mentioned about the part she played at Loon Straits. MPM missionary wives were likely more involved in non-domestic tasks before they had children and became busy in their own homes.[438] There was also an unspoken assumption among Mennonites of the time that single women could legitimately become more publicly involved than married women, especially when they were missionaries. Thus, for example, Edna Dahlke, teacher at Pauingassi, wrote a long report for the *MPMQ* as did Agnes Unrau, teacher at Matheson Island.[439] Married women seemed to blend into the identification of their husbands, although they were often included in greetings or signatures and were active in assisting with traditional female roles such as hospitality. They also helped with Sunday school teaching and Daily Vacation Bible Schools

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It was more customary for the female partner to change conferences when two different branches of Mennonites married.

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Other MPM newsletters are also signed by both husband and wife as the Brandt letters are. However, in the first Brandt newsletter from Oxford House the writer refers to "my husband" or "Edwin" so it is obviously written by Margaret See *MPMQ* (1946): 7-9. See also MHC, Vol. 359, Mr and Mrs. Edwin C. Brandt to Rev. Hoeppner, 15 August 1946. Pictures of MPM workers show how many children these young wives had. An undated picture of the Brandts at Loon Straits shows them with four small children. Gerbrandt, 339.

[439]See *MPMQ* (December 1960): 3 and (September 1952): 8 and ((January 1953): 6.

in summer. However, they never preached or reported to the MPM Board. Part of the original definition of MPM, was "a band of men whose hearts God has touched for the great task of proclaiming His love to all mankind."[440] Although this masculine language was said to be inclusive of both genders, it was suggestive of a Mennonite woman's place in the 1940s and 1950s.

From 1943 to 1945 Brandt, as a conscientious objector, taught for the United Church at Island Lake, and from 1945 to 1947 he was a missionary for the United Church at Oxford House. In 1948, the Brandts began work for Northern Canada Evangelical Mission, spending one year among the Cree at Buffalo Narrows, Saskatchewan and then eight years at Grand Rapids, Manitoba. From 1957 to 1962, the Brandts worked for MPM at Loon Straits. Altogether, they spent twenty years in the North.[441]

Brandt's Methods and Attitudes

According to his wife's 1946 letter, Edwin Brandt's work for the United Church at Oxford House Reserve consisted of registering births, deaths, and marriages; distributing family allowances, widows' rations and government relief; dispensing medicines; and conducting Sunday services. The Cree lived in tents, hunted, and were "very care-free people and scriptural only in the fact that they have no care for the morrow." Missionaries had visited Oxford House for the last hundred years but the Cree "still [adhered] closely to all their old customs, beliefs, and superstitions," Margaret wrote. She continued that many of them could neither read nor write, but even those who could read their Cree Bibles[442] did it only "because

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[440]*MPMQ* (July 1945): 3.

[441]Edwin Brandt, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 12 January 2004.

[442]These Cree Bibles were likely written in the syllabic script.

of habit or superstition, interfering in no way with the heathenish, sinful life." The Roman Catholic priest could speak the Cree language, but Edwin Brandt could only read and understand Cree, not speak it. Catholics, wrote Margaret, were attracting the Cree but those who went to the Catholic church were "probably lukewarm Christians.[443]

In 1949 the Brandts, now under Northern Canada Evangelical Mission at Grand Rapids, Manitoba, submitted a letter to the *Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly*. They observed that usually the Mennonite constituency thought that people who were involved in idol worship, immorality, and witchcraft lived in Africa, South America, or China but the Brandts were seeing such practices among northern Canada's aboriginals. Yet in spite of their superstitions, the Cree were "in their own eyes, very religious." The United Church, according to the Brandts, had given the Cree a dead form of Christianity in a language they could not understand. The Brandts, in contrast, sang "good old gospel songs" with them, read the Bible "as it is" and spoke to them simply in "a language they can understand."[444] The Brandts' assumption that the Cree had never understood what they had been taught is problematic, since the Methodist James Evans had translated many scriptures and hymns into syllabic script in the early 1840s and syllabics were widely used by Protestant missionaries in northern Manitoba after that.[445] They likely meant that they were unhappy with United Church teaching because,

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MPMQ (3rd Quarter, 1946): 7-9. Margaret did not say how she was progressing with the Cree language.

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MPMQ (April 1949): 4-7. Doubtless Margaret Brandt did not mean speaking in the Cree language, unless they had an interpreter, but rather telling the biblical stories in simple terms.

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Grant, 111. An unnamed Mennonite author made reference to James Evans and also Egerton Young and their successful evangelistic work in northern Manitoba in the *MPMQ*. Unfortunately, said the author, all of their good work had disappeared. *MPMQ* (September

in their opinion, the United Church ministers did not explain what it meant to be truly converted and to live a disciplined Christian life.

In 1951, MPM gave some financial support to the Brandts who were still at Grand Rapids under Northern Canada Evangelical Mission, a mission Mennonites trusted.[446] Brandt distributed Cree tracts and taught the Gospel in Cree, sometimes with the aid of flannelgraphs [447] The Brandts conducted a successful Daily Vacation Bible School with fifty-one children attending. They also went berry picking with the Cree who, according to the Brandts, did not take enough responsibility to plant a garden and thus had too much time for sin.[448]

Just as the Brandts mistrusted the previous teachings of the United Church at Oxford House, they disparaged the teachings of Anglicans and Roman Catholics at Grand Rapids. They labeled them "the opposition" who mixed "the sound with the foolish," and Santa Claus and dances with announcements of Holy Communion. Brandt told Cree mothers to keep their children from attending any of "the priest's doings." He wrote: "In Grand Rapids it is a known fact that the Anglicans and Catholics get along very fine together; both need Christ and separation from the flesh, world, and the devil."[449]

In July 1957, Edwin and Margaret Brandt were accepted as MPM missionaries to Loon Straits. Gerbrandt described them as "true Northerners" who had worked for the Northern

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1954): 10.

[446] See *MPMQ* (September 1954): 11.

[447] Flannelgraphs were flannel-covered easels on which flannel backed pictures could be mounted to illustrate a story. They were often used to tell children stories.

[448] *MPMQ* (June 1951): 4, 7; (September 1951): 5-6.

[449] *MPMQ* (February 1952): 8; (September 1952): 4.

Canada Evangelical Mission for nine years. According to Gerbrandt, the Loon Straits people were happy that the Brandts were coming.[450] In 1958, George Groening, Chairman of the MPM Board, reported to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada that the Board was planning to organize a church at Loon Straits soon.[451]

However, problems began soon after the Brandts arrived at Loon Straits. From the beginning, they were not content with their living arrangements. They wrote: "Flies in the house, frogs in the basement, and mice in the bedroom....However, we came here to bring the Gospel of Christ to a people who needed help. His love constrains us and His grace alone is sufficient for the many activities daily and weekly."[452] Since Edwin Brandt and his wife did not like the mission house, MPM rented Garf and Gladys Monkman's house for the Brandts to live in.[453]

Brandt saw other problems with the mission. Although there was a stable nucleus of Christians at Loon Straits, he reported at the end of 1959 that one family was taking too much control. Garf and Gladys Monkman had come back to Loon Straits in the spring of 1958 [454] and were a threat to Brandt. Brandt found that the Loon Straits group was too individualistic and traditional and too interdenominational in their thinking. In other words, he was unable to

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[450]"Our New Missionaries," by Henry Gerbrandt, *MPMQ* (July 1957): 8.

[451]*Conference of Mennonites in Canada Yearbook* (*CMCY*) (1958): 150.

[452]"Our Trip to Loon Straits," by Edwin and Margie Brandt, *MPMQ,* (November 1957): 4.

[453]
I have not found a record of when a mission house was built. Perhaps the Brandts moved into the house that the Wiebes had lived in during the two summers they were at Loon Straits.

[454]
MHC, Volume 276, letter from Edwin Brandt to Henry Gerbrandt, 18 January 1958. Brandt wonders how soon they will need to move out of the Monkmans' house.

shape them into the organized Mennonite church desired by MPM. Earlier, as noted, Gerbrandt had said: "I could not tell them that they were all wrong and we were all right. We will study the Bible together."[455] The Board and Brandt had expected that as they studied the Bible with the Loon Straits Christians, they would come to see doctrines and church organization as Mennonites did. Now, however, it became evident that these Christians were firm in their "Brethren" opinions and would not be molded into the Mennonite image. Gerbrandt, who wrote the minutes based on Brandt's report, ended by saying: "We want to teach the gospel as we understand it, yet at the same time we have to allow those people to express themselves."[456]

The Loon Straits Christians favored evangelism while Brandt wanted to stress Bible teaching and nurture so that new converts would grow and become mature.[457] Garf Monkman wanted to "break bread" every Sunday but MPM missionaries observed communion much less frequently.[458] Monkman was wary of an organized church or formal church membership, according to his "Brethren" beliefs. Brandt noted that Monkman was "very careful not to let anyone snare him into a church or church membership."[459] Another point of frustration was

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[455]MHC, Volume 352, 31 March 1955.

[456]MHC, Volume 348, Minutes of the MPM Executive, 29 December 1959.

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MHC, Volume 359, letter from Groening to Brandt, 3 February 1958. See also Brandt to Gerbrandt, 12 February 1958 where Brandt writes that Garf Monkman wants more "the breaking of bread" while Brandt wants "real Bible teaching." See also Brandt to Gerbrandt, 12 November 1958.

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MHC, Lawrence Klippenstein file, Klippenstein to George Groening, 13 February 1957. The Bergthaler traditionally celebrated communion three times a year--on the first Advent Sunday, at Easter, and at Pentecost.

[459]MHC, Volume 359, letter from Brandt to Gerbrandt, 12 November 1958.

that Garf Monkman owned the house that the Brandts lived in and had built the chapel on his own land. By 1958, plans were underway to build a new mission house. The board had some reservations about Brandt's plans. "How wise is it to build these southern houses in such an area?" Gerbrandt wondered.[460]

In May 1959, Garf and Gladys Monkman complained to Gerbrandt that Brandt was not telling the Loon Straits Christians about his speaking engagements at other places, conferences he attended, or the state of church finances. Gerbrandt suggested organizing a Loon Straits committee with a treasurer. He wrote to Brandt: "It is their building and we want them to feel it shall be a local church. Garf and Gladys are willing to support you, but they want more recognition."[461]

The tension escalated. In February 1960, Garf Monkman came to Altona to serve Gerbrandt with an ultimatum. Since MPM had done nothing about Brandt's unsatisfactory relationship with the Loon Straits people, they wanted him and MPM to leave Loon Straits and the other stations along Lake Winnipeg permanently. Monkman's reasons were that the mission had been detrimental to the people, since MPM's ideas about baptism and church policy were different from those held by local Christians. Monkman felt that Brandt was interested only in personal advancement. The southern style mission house, planned and built for Brandt, was offensive to Monkman.[462]

The MPM Board met for long and deliberate consultations before they responded to Garf and Gladys Monkman. They reported to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, held

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[460]MHC, Volume 359, letter from Gerbrandt to Brandt, 13 May 1958.

[461]MHC, Volume 359, letter from Gerbrandt to Brandt, 6 May 1959.

[462]MHC, Volume 359, Gerbrandt to Brandt, 23 February 1960.

in summer, that there was friction between those who called themselves "Brethren" at Loon Straits, and the Mennonite workers. The "Brethren" said they could not work with Mennonites, but MPM thought they should be able to work together.[463] The Loon Straits Christians lost patience with the MPM Board and decided to excommunicate both Brandt and the Board according to their literal understanding of Matthew 18:15-20. The result was that the community was polarized. Those persons whom MPM formerly called Christians met in the chapel with Garf Monkman, while those who had not been coming to church previously now attended services in the Brandt home.[464] The Mennonite teachers at Loon Straits sympathized with the Garf Monkman group so they attended services at the chapel.[465] In spite of the friction and the recommendation of the Board that he leave, Brandt remained at Loon Straits until 1962 when he began a counseling service for Native people in Winnipeg under the auspices of MPM. Orville Andres, who followed Edwin Brandt at Loon Straits, tried to heal the rift between the Loon Straits factions, and with time he was at least partially successful.[466] Andres and his wife, Katie, left Loon Straits in February 1966 because there were only four families left and two were planning to move away in the spring.

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[463]*CMCY* (1960): 96.

[464]*CMCY* (1961): 97.

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MHC, Volume 276, Gerbrandt's report to the MPM Executive Committee, 20 April 1960. The Brethren were following Matthew 18: 15-20, where Jesus tells his disciples that if someone sins against one of them, he is to go to him and admonish him. If he does not listen, he should take several others with them and speak to him in front of witnesses. If he still refuses to listen, the church must admonish him. If that fails, he is to be treated as "a pagan or a tax collector," meaning that all communication with him is severed. Mennonites understood this practice well as they used it themselves.

[466]Report of the Board of Missions by David P. Neufeld, *CMCY* (1964): 74.

Brandt and Change

Brandt did not undergo any beneficial changes during his tension-filled time at Loon Straits. Although he had been well received at Grand Rapids,[467] relationships with the Loon Straits people deteriorated almost from the beginning. Anne Monkman was positive about Mennonite teachers who taught at Loon Straits and mentioned that people appreciated visits by Jake Unrau. The Loon Straits people received all ministers gladly, no matter who they were or where they came from, because they were happy to have "fellowship." She included a story by Jake and Helen Wiebe about their two summers at Loon Straits. The Wiebes wrote:

> ...ours was not the first Christian work at Loon Straits. Garf, Gladys, Kay and Laura taught Sunday school and Garf held the Lord's supper....All but two men came to the church services....The community of Loon Straits was very receptive to the Christian work....Garf had already started building the chapel before we came.[468]

The fact that Anne Monkman did not mention Edwin and Margaret Brandt or include them in her history is mute evidence that their ministry was not accepted.

Kathleen Monkman, better known as "Auntie Kay," was one of the Sunday school teachers at Loon Straits who stayed with the chapel group after Brandt was expelled. Her husband, Joe Monkman, was a brother to Garf Monkman. Although she listed all of the teachers and included a short description of the chapel built by Garf Monkman and Jake Wiebe, she mentioned the Brandt family only in connection with their children, who left the

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[467] Pauline Ivaniski, interview with Alvina Block, 3 July 2003. Pauline lived at Grand Rapids when the Brandts were missionaries there. She said they were wonderful.

[468] Anne Monkman, 38-40.

school when the family moved away.[469] However, she included a copy of an anniversary card with several signatures, one of them being "Marge and Edwin."[470]

Adolf Ens, who taught at Loon Straits from 1958 to 1959, thinks that the rift was between William Monkman's own children, who ran the community and had government jobs, and his brother's children (who also grew up in William's home) who had less prestigious employment. Though all of the children had attended Sunday school, they had formed separate groups. Brandt was apparently the catalyst for the polarization, with the central clan led by Garf Monkman staying in the chapel while the others rallied around Brandt.[471]

Yet favourable things were happening as well. Jo-Anne Johnson Sveinson, whose father was Ojibwa, grew up at Loon Straits around the time when Adolf Ens was teaching there (1958 to 1959). She said Loon Straits was an isolated area so she went to Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS), conducted by the Mennonites, for something to do. Sveinson says that the Bible, as taught in those DVBS classes, gave her a grounding for life. She is now a Jehovah's Witness.[472]

469

Kathleen Monkman, 42. Included in this book is a very short chapter written by Gladys Monkman about the Loon Straits chapel. See pages 97-98. On page 98, there is a picture of the simple chapel building and a Sunday school card with the verse: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Proverbs 28:13 KJB (King James Version). It is possible that the inclusion of this verse has something to say about the rift. The Loon Straits Christians, of Plymouth Brethren background, used the King James Version of the Bible and interpreted it literally.

470

Kathleen Monkman, 115. The card was for Joe and Kay Monkman's twentieth-fifth wedding anniversary which took place in 1958.

471

Adolf Ens, interview with Alvina Block, 24 April 2003. Yet, the two books by Anne and Kathleen Monkman depict a close knit community that worked and played together.

472 Jo-Anne Sveinson, interview with Alvina Block, 22 January 2002.

Apparently Brandt thought he was experienced in the North and had no need to listen to different people or to be flexible in new surroundings. Loon Straits was quite different from Grand Rapids, however, since it already had a strong Christian witness. Garf Monkman had been the religious leader at Loon Straits before Brandt came and was still the unacknowledged leader, even when he was gone. But Brandt, like some other MPM missionaries, believed that he was the real religious leader of misguided people who knew little about the genuine Gospel message. Most early MPM missionaries, the Board, and the constituency assumed that one who was called by God to a community, was the authority figure in that community. J.D. Funk, Executive Secretary of Native Ministries in the late 1980s, stated that there had been an "assumption in Evangelicalism that the missionary role conferred authoritative leadership" but that this assumption was "misguided." Funk believed that such views about missionary authority caused the division at Loon Straits.[473] J.A. Loewen, Mennonite anthropologist, wrote about such situations: "In regard to potential prophets an early recognition could prevent the missionary from stifling or frustrating such a prophet in his development. Not only is it possible, but it is highly probable that conflict between missionaries and emerging prophets will arise."[474] To their detriment, Edwin Brandt and the MPM Board did not recognize a potential prophet element in Garf Monkman. The Brandts had been judgmental about defining

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473

J.D. Funk, "The Changing Role of Theology in the Native Ministries Program," 1997, 3. Ike Froese collection, copies in the possession of Alvina Block.

474

Jacob A. Loewen, *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975), 75.

who was a Christian and who was not at Grand Rapids.[475] They carried this attitude to Loon Straits as well.

The original definition of "Mennonite Pioneer Mission" in the first *MPMQ*, explains part of the problem. "Pioneer" was defined thus: "Pioneers are a fearless, courageous, persevering, and progressive, advancing people" who are to bring the Gospel to "untouched friends where as yet the name of Jesus is not known."[476] The notion of leaving the home community for the "untouched" north was romantic and attractive to Mennonite young people, expressed as it was in pious language. The constituency wanted to hear about great spiritual darkness and need. It was a way to appeal for workers and money. Such publicity was used to describe the Tarahumara in Mexico and foreign missions in India and Africa. But what happened when there had been previous contacts and there were already Christians or even leaders in northern Manitoba mission places? Then MPM workers and Board members seemed to vacillate between acknowledging that there were indeed some Christians and saying that there were none or only a few. Always they emphasized the "great need" and the "spiritual darkness."[477] Loon Straits did not fit into the MPM mission statement.

The Brandts also had difficulty with acknowledging any good in other denominations. At Oxford House, they did not think that past contacts had made any difference to the lives of

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They wrote: "There has been some strong opposition on the part of some here. The reason? They still believe that being good Anglicans or Catholics they will at the end attain heaven." Brandt told the children to stay away from the priests. *MPMQ* (September 1952): 4.

[476]*MPMQ* (July 1945): 3.

477

The cover page for *MPMQ* beginning in 1953 was based on Acts 16:9: "Come over and help us." The logo shows hands outstretched, north of an open Bible with a map of lakes Manitoba and Winnipeg in the background. The editor interprets it as "the Macedonian call of our own Northland."

the Cree. At Grand Rapids, they were sure that the United Church was giving the Cree only a dead form of Christianity. They felt the same way about the Anglicans and Roman Catholics at Grand Rapids. Finally, at Loon Straits, they failed to see that they could cooperate with the Brethren Assemblies people who had done good work there in the past. The MPM Board was determined that their missionary should win the Loon Straits people over to the accepted Mennonite beliefs. The missionary's and the board's lack of ability to change backfired at Loon Straits. Although Orville Andres tried to restore harmony to the community, the work of MPM disintegrated there, even before Loon Straits shrank to a few families in the late 1960s.

Otto Hamm

MPM opened another station in 1956 at Cross Lake. Its two earliest missionaries were Otto Hamm and Ernie Sawatzky. Otto Hamm was born in Altona in 1925 of parents with both Sommerfelder and Bergthaler backgrounds. The family later moved to Saskatchewan and then to MacGregor, Manitoba where Hamm was exposed to people from many different denominations as well as Native peoples. Hamm was converted at age fourteen and three years later, took catechism classes and was baptized by the Bergthaler Elder David Schulz. In addition to grade twelve, Hamm took one year of teacher's college and short courses in the summer. He taught at Grand Rapids from 1951 to 1954 while the Brandts were missionaries there.[478] In the winter of 1954 to 1955, he attended Elim Bible School and then took a spring term at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC). MPM accepted him and his wife, the former Margaret Neufeld from Altona, as their missionaries in 1955. However, they recommended that Hamm go to CMBC for another year and also spend a summer at the

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Edwin Brandt, telephone interview by Alvina Block, 12 January 2004. See also *MPMQ* (September 1951): 5-6.

Carenport School of Linguistics in Saskatchewan. Hamm followed their advice, spending another year (1955-56) at CMBC and the summer of 1956 at Carenport. The examining committee noted that although Hamm had received a call at a missions conference at Elim Bible School in 1950, he had been reluctant to give up his good home and car, but by now (1955) he was willing to respond positively.[479] Gerbrandt described Hamm thus: "Brother Hamm is very interested in the Indian. He has been trying to study his background and why the Indian acts as he does. This will help in his later work."[480]

Otto and Margaret Hamm already had four children when they went to Cross Lake in the fall of 1956, so there is little mention of Margaret's activities in the reports. No doubt she was busy at home. The Hamm family remained in Cross Lake until 1962. From 1962 to 1964, Hamm again attended CMBC, spending the summers at Cross Lake. Ernie and Gert Sawatzky were the missionaries at Cross Lake during summers when the Hamms were absent. The Hamms returned to full-time service at Cross Lake in 1964 and stayed until 1966.[481]

Hamm's Initial Methods and Attitudes

Hamm's impression of Cross Lake society was that it was divided into a caste system much like India. The upper class was made up of foreigners–HBC factors, teachers, missionaries. This elite class kept apart from the others. The middle class was made up of

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[479] MHC, Volume 280, Examining Report re Otto Hamm, no date, likely spring of 1955. The mission conference where Hamm received the call had taken place five years earlier.

[480] Henry Gerbrandt, "Glimpses of our Work," *MPMQ* (August 1955): 3

[481] Otto Hamm, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 3 March 2004.

non-treaty Indians while treaty Indians were in the lowest class. Hamm's goal was to make connections with people in each of these groups.[482]

Hamm was impressed with the "overdose of religion" at Cross Lake. The United and the Roman Catholic Churches were both present and had left their marks on the people and these marks seemed to be interchangeable. Yet the Cree had not dispensed with traditional religion. They had merely added on more "charms," so that their religious life seemed to be a mix of all they had been in contact with. Even some of the strongest United Church members had crucifixes in their homes and "shields around their necks." Hamm stated that "superstition is still as much a part of their life as when every stone and tree was a spirit."[483]

Both Cree and people of mixed ancestry lived at Cross Lake. Many residents spoke enough every-day English to deal with the HBC but not enough to use English as a spiritual language.[484] Henry Gerbrandt, then secretary of the MPM Board, urged Hamm to spend his time in language study rather than in constructing a mission house.[485] Others could do the building. Gerbrandt wrote: "If you get the language and preach the Gospel in Cree yourself, that will be the first time many of those people will hear it. I have never thought much of translators who have not grasped the Gospel themselves." Gerbrandt continued that each

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[482]MHC, Volume 280, Hamm to Groening, 1 January 1957.

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MHC, Volume 280, Hamm to ? Undated, likely in 1956 as the Hamms had not yet finished unpacking. At Cross Lake, MPM deviated from their policy of going only to places where other denominations were not actively working.

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Ernie Sawatzky, " Canada's Indians Live in Another World: How to Clothe Gospel Message in the Cultural Garb of Society," *The Canadian Mennonite* (15 March 1963): 5.

[485]

A mission house was built during the first year Hamm was at Cross Lake (1956-1957) and a chapel the next year since homes were not big enough for the number of people who came to services. See *CMCY* (1957): 104 and (1959): 197.

discipline has its own language; so for Hamm to speak the everyday Cree was not enough. Missionaries should grasp the spiritual vocabulary in the language of the people. Gerbrandt did not think that a person who had "not learned the language of the Spirit" should interpret. Thus it would be good for Hamm to preach without an interpreter.[486]

Hamm tried very hard to learn the Cree language using tapes, not only of Cree Bible passages but also of Native stories put on tape by his school boys.[487] By May 1957 he could understand enough of what his interpreter was saying to check on its accuracy.[488] However, Hamm still found difficulty in explaining concepts such as salvation to the people in the Cree language.[489]

At Cross Lake, all of the people had been baptized as infants either by the United Church minister or the Roman Catholic priest Apostolic groups (another brand of Pentecostals) also actively proselytized at Cross Lake. On one occasion in the 1960s, three different factions of Apostolics held baptisms on the same day at three different places, each with their own slight variation of belief.[490] The emphasis placed upon small differences of theology and form must have been extremely confusing for the Cross Lake people.

Hamm's goal was a Cree church with a Cree pastor; but he could see that it was difficult for Native peoples to understand Mennonites. In June of 1960 Hamm baptized two

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[486]MHC, Volume 280, Gerbrandt to Hamm, 8 February 1957.

[487]MHC, Volume 280, Hamm to Gerbrandt, 6 April 1957. Cree materials were available and some of the Cross Lake people spoke English, so it should have been easier for Hamm to learn Cree than it was for Henry Neufeld to learn Ojibwe.

[488]MHC, Volume 280, Hamm to Gerbrandt, 20 May 1957.

[489]MHC, Volume 280, Hamm to Gerbrandt, 9 September 1957.

[490]Otto Hamm, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 3 March 2004.

women upon the confession of their faith, thus establishing the nucleus of the Elim Mennonite Church at Cross Lake.[491] One of these women proved to be an active member, serving as Hamm's interpreter. The other woman vacillated between the Catholic and the Mennonite Church.[492]

After the Hamms had been at Cross Lake for four years, MPM had one active convert out of the population of 1200 Cree. Several other persons had made decisions to convert but had reverted to their old ways.[493] In 1962, Hamm decided to get further education at CMBC. While the Hamm family continued to live at Cross Lake in the summers, Ernie and Gert Sawatzky filled in as missionaries in the winters of 1962-1963 and 1963-1964. They returned to Cross Lake again from 1966 to 1968.

Ernie Sawatzky

Ernie Sawatzky, born in 1933, was from Swift Current, Saskatchewan. He went to the Swift Current Bible School, a Mennonite school, after which he graduated with a B.A. in biology from the University of Saskatchewan.

When Henry Gerbrandt contacted Ernie and his wife Gert, they were at Elkhart, Indiana, at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary from which he graduated in 1962.[494] While he was at the Seminary, Sawatzky took courses in linguistics and anthropology. His

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[491] *MPMQ* (June 1960): 13. See also *CMCY* (1960): 95

[492] *CMCY* (1961): 97.

[493] "Efforts Not in Vain at Cross Lake" by Henry Gerbrandt, *MPMQ* (December 1960): 6-7.

[494] The Elkhart Seminary was closely connected with neighboring Goshen College, an Old Mennonite College known for its progressive ideas. During the school year 1923-1924, at the height of the Fundamentalist debate, the Mennonite Board of Education closed this school "to remove Modernist influences." The school opened again in 1924. See Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War,* 265.

anthropology courses were with Yoder from Goshen College, and later with Eugene A. Nida and William Smalley.[495] Nida taught conservative evangelical students to take a "sympathetic approach to the problems of cultural diversity throughout the world" and tried to help young people "overcome typical North American cultural biases and make them more able to understand and appreciate the diversities of behavior and thought that exist in a culturally heterogeneous world."[496] Studying with Nida and other missionary anthropologists gave Sawatzky cross-cultural understanding for Native people. He also took two Cree linguistics courses, one in Winnipeg and one in Edmonton.[497] Although Gerbrandt invited the Sawatzkys for a one year term position at Cross Lake while the Hamms were on furlough, he urged them to learn the Cree language so that they would be ready in case MPM decided to place two workers at Cross Lake in the future. In any case, Gerbrandt was hoping that the Sawatzkys would become long term MPM workers.[498]

Sawatzky and Change

Hamm and Sawatsky differed in their methods. Hamm's method had been to stay at Cross Lake, interact with other denominations, and visit the people who were at home.

495

Ernie Sawatzky, telephone conversation with Alvina Block, 20 June 2005. Sawatzky does not remember the first names of these anthropologists. It is possible that Yoder is Sanford Calvin Yoder who was president of Goshen College from 1923 to 1940. Eugene Nida was a noted Protestant missionary anthropologist who had served as Bible translator with Wycliffe Bible Translators and the American Bible Society. William Smalley was a missionary anthropologist with a special interest in language and linguistics. Both Nida and Smalley published articles in a missionary journal called *Practical Anthropology*. Stephen A. Grunlan & Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2d ed.,(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 67.

[496]See Nida's foreward in Grunlan & Mayers, xi-xii.

[497]Ernie Sawatzky, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 16 March 2004.

[498]MHC, Volume 358, Gerbrandt to Ernie and Gert Sawatzky, 8 March 1962.

Because the men were out on the trap line, it was the women who connected with the Hamms during their house visitations and, as a result, the church attendance at Cross Lake was made up of women.[499] Sawatzky, in contrast, went out on the trap line with the men, listened to them, and won their attention and respect. David P. Neufeld, MPM Board Chairman, commented in his report to the Conference: "The Sawatzkys have been successful in getting to understand the Indian soul by such unorthodox means as going out on the trapline with an Indian trapper for three weeks, or attending an Indian dance until midnight or more."[500] Mennonite church members who were not in contact with the Cree did not understand how such unconventional methods could fit into the job description of their MPM missionary. Sawatzky remembers that he was "called on the carpet to Winnipeg" and reprimanded for his new methods.[501]

Sawatzky was expressive and analytical about MPM work among Native peoples and he communicated his ideas freely to the Board, the constituency, and also to Hamm. In the spring of 1963, Sawatzky wrote an article for the *Canadian Mennonite* called "Canada's Indians Live in Another World: How to Clothe Gospel Message in the Cultural Garb of their Society." As the title suggests, Sawatzky was grappling with the issue of change in methods. How could people of another culture be converted to Christianity? He realized that the message of the Bible, which had been written to people of a Hebrew or Greek culture, was being reinterpreted by Christian missionaries to suit their own culture, while Natives had yet

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[499]Henry Neufeld, conversation with Alvina Block, 13 March 2004.

[500]*CMCY* (1964): 75.

[501]Ernie Sawatzky, telephone conversation with Alvina Block, 20 June 2005.

another culture.[502] In his article, he emphasized the "otherness" of the people at Cross Lake. He pondered how best to bridge the gap to this other world in Canada. The Cree and people of mixed ancestry were different in their life-style, and in their attitude toward money, time, and work. The government had treated the Cross Lake people as children and they had learned to get as much out of the government as they possibly could. Many of the customs once held by Cross Lake residents had eroded and nothing had replaced them. For example, he claimed that the family structure had once been matrilineal where mother's brother had been influential in child rearing. That system had broken down, but the children's father, who was the authority figure in the white patrilineal society, had not replaced mother's brother. Children were left to their own devices and Native family and social structures were eroding.[503]

Sawatzky's impression was that the Cree still believed in their god, "Kici-manito[504]," a god who needed to "be appeased and whose favor must be sought." He was not the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" nor the "God working in history reconciling man and offering him redemption." They still offered bundles as sacrifices, much as the Old Testament Hebrews

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See also MHC, Volume 358, Ernie Sawatzky to Otto Hamm, no date but likely September 1964 since it is a response to a note left by Hamm called "Things to think about" in transition (Hamm had been at Cross Lake for the summer and Sawatzky was back for the winter months.)

503

Here Sawatzky seems to follow Bachofen's hypothesis on *Mutterrecht*, a generalization that all Native tribes were matrilineal. However, Sawatzky does not recall reading Bachofen. He said he got his information that the Cree were a matrilineal society from Leonard Bloomfield. Ernie Sawatzky, telephone conversation with Alvina Block, 20 June 2005. The Cree, however, have always been patrilineal. Leonard Bloomfield wrote a monograph in 1930 called *Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree.*

504

Kici-manito was the word used for God in Cree Bibles for want of a better word. Its actual meaning, according to Sawatzky, was Great Spirit. Ernie Sawatzky, telephone conversation with Alvina Block, 16 March 2004.

offered animal sacrifices to Yahweh to save them from their sins.[505] According to Sawatzky, the Cree were confused by their exposure to many different denominations. They thought Kici-manito had "moved upstairs" since 1840 when the Methodists came to Cross Lake. Through the teachings of the United Church, "Kici-manito" had acquired a Son who was more interested in economic and social than spiritual needs; in any case, the Son was sleeping. When the Roman Catholics came, the Son got a mother who was interested in all of her children everywhere. The priest made sure that everything was in harmony between the people and their god; there was nothing they need do except confess to the priest. Now the Mennonites were trying to give real life to the Son but, wrote Sawatzky, "his face is too white and his teaching too demanding."

The Pentecostals who had moved into Cross Lake, however, were successful in giving Jesus a "very friendly Indian face."[506] In fact, wrote Sawatzky, the Pentecostal face of Jesus was "so Indian that at times it still [wore] the medicine man's mask. This Jesus [was] most appealing because he [was] truly Indian maybe often more animistic than Christian." The Pentecostals were winning converts and some of these converts were becoming Native Pentecostal preachers who were much more successful in explaining the way of salvation than

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Ernie Sawatzky, telephone conversation with Alvina Block, 20 June 2005. Offering bundles as sacrifices to save from sin does not agree with other sources that traditional Native peoples were without a concept of sin and guilt. For example, see Paul Schultz and George Tinker who write: "Before the missionaries came, the Native Peoples had little theoretical sense of sin, no sense of fallen humanity, and no sense of basic inclination in every human being to do evil." In "Rivers of Life: Native Spirituality for Native Churches" in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 58.

506

In 1964, Tommy Francis, a Cree evangelist from the Pas, held services at Cross Lake and as a result 11 persons were converted and six backsliders were restored to the faith. *CMCY,* (1964): 75.

white missionaries. Many Cross Lake residents were saying that in all these years they had not understood the missionary's message, but when it was explained by their own people they could finally grasp it. Perhaps, pondered Sawatzky, MPM should leave evangelizing to Native Pentecostal preachers and concentrate on teaching the resulting converts how to mature in their Christian life.

Another reason for the Native Pentecostal preachers' appeal was that they were critical of non-Natives and their churches. Just as people in foreign countries had opposed western religion and domination in recent nationalistic movements, so also Canada's Natives were trying to rid themselves of "the white man's yoke." The Pentecostal movement was giving them an avenue to oppose non-Native religious expressions and to formulate belief and worship in their own way. Sawatzky called this new Native way of worship "Pentecostal animism." He did not think it should be lightly dismissed because it was an "excellent opportunity to study what the Indian really [believed]." Further, it pointed to the need to allow for more Native participation, something Mennonites had neglected to encourage. The best Mennonite Native church members were joining the Pentecostals, which had seemed too emotional to MPM, demonstrating "their need for a different type of expression." One of these expressions was the healing service, which was taking the place of Native medicine and rituals. Pentecostals emphasized the local church rather than larger organizations, such as conference or denominational affiliations. Sawatzky recommended that this narrow evangelical Pentecostal outlook could become the foundation for more thorough biblical teaching so it should not be thrown out. He also thought that, because of their history and present disorientation, Natives had a need for security, protection, and stability. Perhaps

Mennonites could provide this need better than Pentecostals who were not usually resident missionaries.[507]

During Sawatzky's time at Cross Lake, the MPM Board and the United Church Board of Home Missions made efforts for closer denominational cooperation because they realized that competition was confusing the Cree. However, D.P. Neufeld (MPM's Acting Executive Secretary) warned about moving too quickly in this regard. He wrote to Sawatzky:

> During the last few days I have had several visitors who have expressed concern about what has been happening at Cross Lake, and perhaps the strongest concern is voiced by Otto Hamm who feels strongly that we are going too fast. If Otto Hamm is to come back, and the Board has decided that he will, we dare not create a situation for him in which he is unable to work. We are therefore looking to you to use utmost discretion in your commitments.[508]

Sawatzky replied: "Though we can say we are just trying to lead people to Christ, as far as all the people and churches are concerned we are proselytizing because we have formed a new church from other church's members." He felt that the United Church now had a clear statement of what conversion meant, but they were not confronting the Cree with the moral differences that should be evident in a believer. But MPM also had weaknesses, continued Sawatzky. Personal decisions for Christ meant individual decisions, but the Cree were used to making important decisions in community. Also, since Mennonites looked for a change in life

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Ernie Sawatzky, "Canada's Indians Live in Another World: How to Clothe Gospel Message in the Cultural Garb of their Society," *The Canadian Mennonite* (15 March 1963): 5, 8.

508

MHC, Volume 358, D.P. Neufeld to Otto Hamm (18 February 1963). D.P. Neufeld, Edwin Brandt, Otto Hamm, J.M. Unrau, and Orville Andres attended the Ninth Indian-Metis Conference held in Winnipeg in February, 1963. Neufeld described this meeting as fascinating because the "redskins" with their "stolid" faces and "hooked noses" were mingling with government personnel, priests, social workers, and ministers and actually giving impressive speeches. He commented that the conference was "a dramatic proof of what the Indian can do." *The Canadian Mennonite*, (22 February 1963): 3.

style after conversion the Cree could get the impression that "being born again" depended on leaving their bad habits rather than on their faith in Jesus.[509]

From the Native perspective, continued Sawatzky, they could easily integrate Roman Catholic, United Church, and Mennonite theology. Therefore it was no problem for the Cree to attend Mass in the morning, the United Church in the afternoon, and the Mennonite Church in the evening. They could attend all of these services without disturbing their own traditional beliefs.[510]

Sawatzky drew other contrasts between Natives and non-Natives. Native people lived for the day and were not concerned for the future. They were reciprocal rather than individualistic, democratic rather than authoritarian, reserved rather than frank and open. Their reserve could be a problem because when Indians were confronted, they would likely lie rather than share what they wanted to keep private. In this regard, Sawatzky saw a problem with confronting Christian or non-Christian Natives about sin. He wrote to Hamm:

> Just how frank should one be in spelling out a people's faults and sins? How shall one expect them to be in confession to one another? Certainly there are legitimate cultural differences–at the same time how far can one yield to those differences without compromising the basic requirements of the Gospel?[511]

509

MHC, Volume 358, Sawatsky to Neufeld, 27 February 1963. Mennonite understanding of "being born again" was repentance and personal, individual faith in Christ. Sawatzky's statement that Native people were not familiar with individual and personal experiences could be contested. The vision quest was an intensely personal experience. Further, spirit birds or animals gave special songs to an individual in dreams or visions, and these were the personal possession of that individual. The individual was to use these songs for the benefit of the community for success in war or hunting and for healing. See Frances Densmore quoted in *Totemak* (January 1973): 4.

510

Here it seems as though the Cree at Cross Lake were not confused by denominationalism but used it to their advantage.

[511]MHC, Volume 358, Sawatzky to Hamm, no date, likely September 1964.

Thus Sawatzky wrestled with the problems that confronted MPM missionaries to Native peoples as no other Mennonite missionary before him had done. George Groening, Chairman of Conference of Mennonites in Canada Board of Missions, was appreciative of Sawatzky's views. He admitted that there was danger in being content with out-dated and wrong methods and acknowledged that MPM had "failed to understand the Indian way of thinking and his way of life."[512]

Ernie and Gert Sawatzky left Cross Lake in the beginning of June, 1964, one month before Otto and Margaret Hamm returned. During the month of June, Oliver Hoeppner, a Mennonite teacher at Cross Lake, carried on with a minimal program. In Hamm's report on the fourth quarter of 1964 (his first after his return), he communicated to the Board that there had been an "Apostolic Invasion" at Cross Lake in July. A group from Minneapolis had come in for three weeks and immersed fifty individuals and healed others amidst "great manifestations of the spirit working in the speaking of tongues and some falling down as dead." The Apostolics had promised that persons who had been "dipped" in the water would sin no more. However, the group was gone, spiritual problems continued, and the Mennonites were left with many unanswered questions. The Mennonite Church consisted, at this time, of two grandmothers and a mother. "We need men," confessed Hamm.[513]

In their prayer letter, Otto and Margaret Hamm acknowledged that they were isolated, lonely, and needing "a boost." They had come back to Cross Lake feeling deflated because

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MHC, Volume 358, Groening to Sawatsky, 6 January 1964. MPM became a part of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1960 and came under their Board of Missions.

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MHC, Volume 358, Cross Lake Report for the fourth Quarter of 1964 by Otto Hamm. The number of converts seems extraordinarily small after eight years of MPM activity. Yet, it compares with Pauingassi where three people were converted after nine years.

they had no new strategy, plans or ideas. They were discouraged because chapel attendance was low, promising converts had backslidden, it was difficult to understand the people, and it was hard to "love the unlovely." Recently Hamm had visited a homeowner who had said that the new home also had a new spirit. When Hamm replied that it was the wrong spirit, he was shown the door.[514]

In his first quarterly report of 1965, Hamm contemplated the purpose of MPM involvement at Cross Lake. When Gerbrandt taught at Cross Lake in the 1940s, he thought an evangelical witness was needed because the Roman Catholics and United Church were not "preaching the Gospel." Hamm still believed that such a need existed. Pentecostals and Apostolics came and went but there should be "continuous, consistent evangelical work" such as MPM could provide. There was a need to teach converts, translate Scriptures, do more visitation, and study the people and their relationship with Mennonites. However, the Hamm family left Cross Lake in1966 because their growing children needed opportunities to go to high school, take music lessons, etc.[515]

Orville and Katie Andres came to Cross Lake from Loon Straits in February 1966. Otto and Margaret Hamm stayed until the middle of April, working together with the Andreses. Andres observed that the Cross Lake people were sorry to see the Hamms go. Andres soon found that the Cree language was a must at Cross Lake, so he recommended that the Board ask Ernie Sawatzky to return.

Sawatzky did not feel demoralized and disappointed with Cross Lake. The changes in method he instigated worked better than Hamm's ways of doing missions in the traditional

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[514]MHC, Volume 358, March prayer letter by Otto Hamms.

[515]MHC, Volume 358, Hamm's report to Menno Wiebe, March 1965.

ways. Even before Sawatzky returned in 1967 the Cross Lake Elim Mennonite Church, showed signs of becoming quite independent. The minutes of a meeting on 24 February 1966 record that Mrs. Mabel McIvor suggested when to have communion and altar calls during church services. She also closed the meeting with a prayer in the Cree language. Jeremiah Ross and Lawrence Castel had preached during chapel services.[516] Jeremiah Ross was baptized on 29 May 1966. He had decided to join the Mennonite church, "not because he felt the others were all wrong, but he felt this was where God wanted him to work."[517] After he was baptized, Ross preached frequently, always in the Cree language (he spoke no English). He did not hesitate to give suggestions to improve the MPM program.[518]

After Sawatzky was back at Cross Lake, he went on a hunting trip with Jeremiah Ross. Ross told Sawatzky about a dream he had while he and his wife Fanny were on a hunting trip in 1942, twenty-five years earlier. They were both tired, hungry, and discouraged because they had not found any game in four days. Jeremiah fell asleep in his tent and dreamed of a ladder which he ascended. At the top, he met the Creator who told him to go back down because his time had not yet come. He was to be a minister to his people. After he climbed back down, he soon captured a moose.[519] When Sawatzky asked him why he was not a minister if that was the message he had received in his dream, Ross answered that he had been afraid to tell anyone

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[516] MHC, Volume 358, Minutes of the Elim Mennonite Church, Cross Lake, Manitoba, 24 February 1966.

[517] MHC, Volume 358, Andres to Hamm, 25 April 1966.

[518] MHC, Volume 358, report by Ernie Sawatzky, December 1966.

[519] This version differs from Menno Wiebe's story where more people were present when Ross shared his dream. See Menno Wiebe, "From Blood Vein to Cross Lake: A 25 Year Synthesis," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* Vol. 19 (2001): 16-17.

about his vision. Ross spoke only Cree, so Sawatzky was not sure he had understood correctly. When they returned from their hunting trip, Sawatzky asked Ross to repeat his dream to his daughter who spoke English. She confirmed what Sawatzky thought he had heard. Sawatzky encouraged Ross to tell his dream to the congregation, which he did, whereupon they unanimously accepted him as their minister. It was not until 1968, however, that Ross actually became Cross Lake's official leader because it was difficult to convince the MPM Board that Ross's call was genuine. Sawatzky had to insist on Ross's ordination.[520] Dreams and visions were not the conventional way to receive a call to the Mennonite pastorate so the Board took some time to get used to the idea.

Ross was ordained on 4 February 1968. Southern Manitoba guests who arrived late Saturday afternoon for the event (hosted by the Sawatzkys) found that Ross was not at home. He had gone "moose hunting" early in the week and had not returned. Ernie and Gert Sawatzky were not concerned; they said he had retreated into the forest to think things over because he was struggling with the implications of the large step he was taking. His wife, Fannie, was not at home either–she had gone to Norway House for a funeral.[521] By Sunday afternoon, when the ordination was to take place, both Ross and his wife were back and the service proceeded as planned. For the next thirty years, Ross was an excellent leader in the

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[520]Ernie Sawatzky, telephone conversation with Alvina Block, 20 June 2005.

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Bulletin (12 March 1968): 6. Ronald Niezen observed that Cree elders recommended going into the bush as a valuable therapy. "Healing and Conversion: Medical Evangelism in James Bay Cree Society," *Ethnohistory* 44.3 (1997): 466. Going into the bush for a spiritual experience was a common pattern among Native peoples. Fair Wind, the Ojibwa medicine man at Pauingassi went into the bush to find comfort after his son died. Maureen Matthews and Roger Roulette, "Fair Wind's Dream: Naamiwan Obawaajigewin" in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, eds. Jennifer S.H. Brown & Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1996), 350.

Elim Mennonite Church. He maintained his role as traditional elder along with his position as Mennonite pastor and continued to hunt and trap.[522] In reflecting on his Cross Lake experience, Sawatzky said that Ross became his best friend.[523] Ernie Sawatzky left Cross Lake in 1968, making his new home at Thompson. From there, he visited Ross several times during the following years.[524]

Henry Neufeld attended Ross's 1968 ordination and began to think seriously that year about choosing Native leaders for Pauingassi as well. The experience, therefore, had further implications for increasing independence and Native leadership at other MPM stations. Ernie Sawatzky and Menno Wiebe, Executive Secretary of MPM beginning in 1964, were instrumental in bringing a change to the ideology of MPM. There was a strong move toward more consultation with the Native people and encouragement towards independence in the churches that had been established. In hindsight, Sawatzky commented in 2004 that he came to Cross Lake at a turning point in MPM missions. This turning point could have come partly because Wiebe was interested in and concerned about cross cultural relationships.

In his report to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1968, Wiebe stated that evangelism really was a problem to Mennonites because if they evangelized they had to make an identity shift from "*Die Stille im Lande*" to reaching out to others. Wiebe observed that two opposite concepts waged war in Mennonite churches: to be the people of God as in the past, or to change the texture of the Mennonite church by inviting people of other cultures in.

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See Menno Wiebe, "Ross, Jeremiah," *Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. V: 777. See also Menno Wiebe, "From Bloodvein to Cross Lake: A 25 year Synthesis," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (Vol. 19, 2001): 16.

[523]Ernie Sawatzky, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 16 March 2004.

[524]Ernie Sawatzky, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 16 March 2004.

The identity shift was basically from a "church for us" to a "church for the world." Wiebe asked: "Do Mennonite churches have the capacity to accept an intensive missions program which is so close to home?" Making converts in distant lands was more comfortable because there was no danger of them becoming a part of home churches and conferences. If Mennonites wanted to evangelize the Indians, they would have to accept them not only as converts but also as brothers.

Furthermore, there was a contradiction between cooperation with other denominations including cessation of competition for souls, and a solid teaching ministry of Anabaptist doctrines such as pacifism and the priesthood of all believers which included decision making at the congregational level. Yet both cooperation and particularism were needed. Wiebe also saw two sides to more education for missionaries. On the one hand, too much sophistication in a missionary was not good for a dejected and demoralized people, such as the Indians were; yet missionaries needed cross cultural education and training in linguistics in order to be effective.[525]

Wiebe commented in 2004 that his ten years with MPM were "rough years" because he advocated that MPM "make a turn around" from perpetuation of dominance to a reciprocal relationship with Native peoples. The MPM Board's questions before 1965 had been utilitarian. How many converts were there and how soon after the missionary came did conversion and church membership take place, and how much money had been spent before this was accomplished?[526] The old way was to go and convert the "heathen." The new way,

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[525]Menno Wiebe, *CMCY* (1968): 47-51.

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Menno Wiebe, interview with Alvina Block, 13 March 2002. This old mind set was especially noticeable in Unrau's reports from Matheson Island. He meticulously stated how many children had been in Sunday school, how many people in the Sunday morning and evening

followed by Sawatzky, was to acknowledge that Native peoples had a lot to teach non-Natives both linguistically and culturally. He listened to Cree stories, and studied their behavior and culture. Sawatzky and Wiebe were often misunderstood by the Board and constituency for their new views. Wiebe, as Executive Secretary, stood between the missionaries and the Board.. The Board, who pushed for organized churches, expected Wiebe to initiate new projects but often did not understand or accept his ideas and suggestions. The Board needed to gain funding and acceptance from the constituency who still thought in terms of traditional missions. They changed much more slowly than the Executive Secretary or those Board members who visited the North or the missionaries who were influenced by the people among whom they lived.[527]

Although the MPM missionaries and Board had undergone a turning point theoretically, problems still arose when they tried to put theories into practice. The following chapter, examines General Conference Missions (1880-1900) and MPM (1948-1970) and compares their attitudes toward indigenization and the contentious issue of syncretism during their early years of operation.

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services, and how many people at Bible study on Wednesday nights. See *MPMQ* (7 December 1949): 2. Good attendance was interpreted as hunger for the Gospel, fitting into the Mennonite theology of missions: "Come and help us, why have you waited so long! Souls are hourly perishing. What are we doing to rescue the perishing?" See George Groening's editorial in *MPMQ* (May 1950): 2.

[527]Ike Froese, interview with Alvina Block, 22 March 2002.

Chapter Seven

The American General Conference Mission and Manitoba Mennonite Pioneer Mission: A Comparison of Beginnings

The American General Conference mission and the Manitoba Mennonite Pioneer Mission had many strong connections. A large portion of the General Conference membership was made up of Mennonites from Russia, and the Manitoba Bergthaler were Russian Mennonites as well. After the General Conference Mission Board members and Bergthaler church leaders met in Newton, Kansas in 1944 to organize and officially launch MPM,[528] visiting guests from the American General Conference frequently came to southern Manitoba to speak at Bergthaler and MPM mission festivals. In 1968, the Bergthaler Church joined the General Conference.

Did MPM begin by building upon lessons already learned by American General Conference missionaries and their Board? Had the General Conference mission actually changed during the first sixty years of its existence? Could MPM in fact learn from its experience in the United States? This chapter compares General Conference and MPM missions, their attitudes and methods, and their views on indigenization and syncretism. The American General Conference mission, in its first decades as described in chapter three, offers some contrasts to MPM beginnings, but in many respects its attitudes and methods were very similar.

General Conference Mission (1880-1930) and MPM (1948-1980): Differences

The American General Conference mission to Native peoples began almost seventy years earlier than MPM, yet the first missionaries had more education and international

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[528]Gerbrandt, 333. The MPM constitution was finalized in 1945 in Manitoba.

exposure than their Canadian counterparts. Samuel Haury and Henry R. Voth both graduated from Wadsworth Seminary where they were influenced by their teacher, Carl Justus van der Smissen, and his family. The van der Smissens came from "a European culture with a background of books, music, wealth, yet...deeply spiritual and keenly interested in mission work, evangelism, and young people."[529] Both Haury and Voth studied further at seminaries and medical colleges. Rodolphe Petter was educated in linguistics and had traveled in Europe. All three of these men had some cross-cultural experience since they had migrated to the United States from Germany, Russia, and Switzerland respectively. It could be argued that these men were available for Native missions in the United States because General Conference overseas missions had not yet begun. After 1900, educated personnel was sent abroad.

In Manitoba, the MPM Board preferred to hire missionaries who had gone to high school, Bible school, or Bible College, but they also hired men and women who had less education. George Groening told the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1957 : "*Eigentlich ist das Beduerfnis einer Bildung fuer dieses Feld nicht so notwendig als fuer die, welche nach dem Auslande gehen.*"[530] Most early MPM missionaries were born to German speaking pioneers who belonged to the Bergthaler Church in Manitoba, whose members were still very traditional and rigid in their understanding of what it meant to be a Christian and suspicious of higher education. Moreover education was not easy to acquire when children

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S.F. Pannabecker, "Wadsworth Mennonite School," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. IV: 867.

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CMCY (1957): 105. The translation of Groening's words is as follows: "The need for a good education is not as great for this field as for overseas missionaries."

had to work for their parents or on neighboring farms to contribute financially to the parental home.[531]

Although the MPM Board thought it was more important for overseas missionaries to have a good education, a Study Commission in 1979 found that "Native Ministries [the name for MPM after 1975] workers, ministers, and those delegates with college and seminary education showed significantly more respect for Native religion than did the rest of the delegates surveyed."[532] With the exception of Sawatzky, early MPM missionaries were not as interested in different world views and religions as General Conference missionaries. They were not capable of observing and detailing ceremonies and artifacts as Voth did among the Hopi and they could not translate the Bible and other works as Petter did. Although both General Conference and MPM missionaries felt culturally superior and both wanted to eradicate traditional religions and replace them with Christianity, early General Conference missionaries were more captivated by other cultures.

Manitoba Mennonites had much connectedness and interaction with American Mennonites, but they did not seem particularly interested in the experiences of their southern counterparts. When I asked Henry Gerbrandt whether MPM benefited from General

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Elsewhere, I have described the Bergthaler as being progressive while here I describe them as being traditional and rigid. These terms are relative. They were progressive since they had become mission minded but they were traditional and rigid in their stance toward higher education.

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Study Commission Report on Native Ministries (1979), 1. Ike Froese file, copies in the possession of Alvina Block. MPM also sent missionaries to India, Africa, Korea, Japan and other areas of the world. See pictures of missionaries in Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith,* 336-337.

Conference missions, he replied that MPM learned from their own mistakes in Mexico.[533] It seems that the Bergthaler Mennonites were reluctant to follow the examples of their American counterparts because they thought American Mennonites were liberal. General Conference missions were linked to higher education, specifically to the Wadsworth Seminary, but it was not until the 1960s that some, not all, Canadian Mennonites began to think that college or university training was acceptable and desirable for Mennonite young people.

Another difference was that American General Conference missionaries worked more closely with their government than MPM missionaries. Private Mennonite schools for aboriginals were funded by the American government in the 1880s. General Conference Mennonites began a residential school at Halstead, Kansas, patterned after Pratt's school at Carlisle. In Manitoba in 1948, schools already existed in most MPM mission sites except at Pauingassi. Although the MPM Board influenced the provincial government to place Mennonite teachers at these schools, the schools were separate entities from the mission. MPM did not begin any residential schools.

General Conference missionaries were much more driven by the idea of Christianity and civilization as a package, so they cooperated with government attempts at assimilation. For example, when Christian Krehbiel and H.R. Voth first went to Oraibi, they were happy that the Hopi were frugal, domestic, and agricultural and that they made and sold clothes, moccasins, and pottery--positive indications that they were "civilized" and that the mission would be more successful than the mission to the Arapaho and Cheyenne who were "uncivilized" hunters.[534] Haury thought the Cheyenne had taken an important step forward

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[533]Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

[534]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (2 March 1893): 1.

when they began to cultivate corn and send their children to school.[535] In contrast, MPM missionaries did not attempt to change the vocations of the Cree or Ojibwa. For example, Henry Neufeld encouraged the Pauingassi people to speak their own language and to go hunting as families.

General Conference missions also had closer relationships with other denominations than did MPM. Actually, early General Conference missions imitated mainline Protestant missions, as Juhnke has noted. He lamented that their missionaries did not teach Anabaptist distinctives such as non-resistance and non-conformity to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi.[536] But the level of denominational competition changed during the next ten years. Petter, coming to Cantonment in 1891 wrote:

> With settlement, other denominations have entered the field and are competing for the Indians. All in all, missionary work has become more difficult. It hurts to see others taking over what Mennonite missionaries have carefully and slowly nurtured eg. the schoolchildren. Other denominations have no schools. They merely move about among the Indians and say that they have already won many converts. Time will tell if such quick work will be enduring.[537]

Yet the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi had had little contact with other denominations before the General Conference missionaries came.

The peoples of mixed ancestry and the Cree and Ojibwa of northern Manitoba had had exposure to missionaries of mainline churches before MPM came to the North. Many of them had been baptized by Anglicans, Roman Catholics, or other groups. In most instances they had

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[535]*The Mennonite* (1886): 26.

[536]Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 2. Juhnke writes mostly about foreign missions, but he devotes his first chapter to Native American missions.

[537]Report from Cantonment by the Petters, *Christlicher Bundesbote* (18 April 1895): 1.

to be proselytized, a great disadvantage for MPM missionaries since it was more difficult to win individuals who had developed loyalties to another brand of Christianity.

To the Cree, Ojibwa, and mixed blood peoples, denominationalism was confusing. Their views were still in line with an 1836 Indian Council at Sault Ste. Marie to which the Ojibwa invited Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Episcopal missionaries. One old chief gave the following advice:

> It is the wish of this council...that you ministers go back to where you got those religions from,–that the Englishman go to our Great Father (William IV)–and that those who are Americans go and see our great grandfather, the President (Andrew Jackson)–and that you all confer with them and settle with them and among yourselves, which is the true religion. When you have done that, come back here and [then] will we listen to you. There is no use listening to you now, for you all disagree as to your religion, while we are all agreed as to ours![538]

MPM distrusted mainline Protestants and Catholics. Early MPM missionaries were certain that they brought the truth and that mainline Protestants and Catholics were false teachers. MPM constituency, Board and missionaries were sure they could judge who was a Christian and who was not. In their view, mainline denominations had religion, but they did not have Christ.

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Alvina Block, "George Flett, Native Presbyterian Missionary: `Old Philosopher'/`Rev'd Gentleman'" (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg, 1997), 36. George Flett, a young man who traveled east with his Red River family in 1837, was at the council and told William Coldwell, Winnipeg *Free Press* editor about the discussions. Coldwell described the Flett journey in "Fifty-one Years Ago," *Free Press*, 12 March 1887. The old chief's speech, spoken from an Ojibwa perspective, differs from late nineteenth century Dene who, according to Kerry Abel, were not confused by the differing religious views of the Protestant and Catholic missionaries among them because traditionally, individual shamans claimed to have different powers and "he whose medicine [was] strongest [won]. Abel's claim for Native agency, especially in the area of religion, is perhaps overstated. *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* 2d. ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 136.

The mission at Cross Lake illustrates this point. Although Methodists and Catholics had been in the Norway House area and had made contact with Cross Lake, Henry Gerbrandt felt strongly that Mennonite missionaries were needed on the reserve. He had observed Catholic priests and United Church ministers offering flour or a ham to the Cree in exchange for baptizing their children. This was wrong, thought Gerbrandt, because baptism should be based upon adult confession of personal faith, not on bribery.[539] Yet, Mennonites were not always above bribery themselves. Danny Thomas, the young son of a Matheson Island Catholic family, claimed he "sold [his] soul for a bowlful of strawberries." When he wistfully eyed Jake and Trudie Unrau's strawberry patch, Unrau promised to give Danny a bowl of strawberries with sugar and cream if he would promise to attend the Mennonite church.[540]

In 1961, 800 out of a population of 1350 at Cross Lake were on the Catholic church roll. Otto Hamm wrote:

> Having been baptized as infants, all feel a sense of belonging to their respective church, yet the essence of Christianity has gripped but a few of them. Many say they respect all religions, and the fact that they attend mass in the morning, United Church in the afternoon, and the Mennonite Mission in the evening proves their point.[541]

Hamm's opinion was that most of the local people who were baptized and on a church roll were on a "false foundation" since they "[considered] themselves Christians even though they [lived] in the grossest sins."[542] MPM missionaries and Board were fearful that all of Cross

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[539]Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

[540]von Gunten, 312.

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Otto Hamm, *Mennonite Pioneer Mission in Cross Lake* (Winnipeg: Issued by Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1961), 6.

[542]Hamm 19.

Lake would soon be Catholic. Gerbrandt stated in 1959: "*Unsere Arbeit ist von diesem Standpunkte aus berechtigt.*"[543]

MPM missionaries eventually came to see that they could benefit through cooperation with mainline Protestants and Catholics, but at first they were rigid in their black and white views of what was truth and what was error. Other Christian groups were present on the eastern shores of Lake Winnipeg. Gerald Thomas began a Brethren Assemblies camp named Faith Bible Camp on Elk Island near Victoria Beach in 1954, where many children received biblical education.[544] If MPM could have been more inclusive and less rigid about minor differences such as baptismal form and frequency of communion services, they could have cooperated with the Brethren Assemblies' efforts at Matheson Island and Loon Straits. However, even when missionaries were ready to embrace a more open approach, their conservative constituency held them back.

Early General Conference missionaries were less threatened by other denominations than MPM and they were not yet influenced by the fundamentalist debate as Manitoba Mennonites were in 1948. Juhnke observes:

> The early Mennonite mission to Native Americans was quite secure and unselfconscious in its total ministry to the needs of people for food, shelter, health, education, and spiritual nurture. It seemed obvious to this generation that to bring the Christian gospel meant to bring the "benefits" of Christendom. The debate between

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[543]*CMCY* (1959): 197. English translation: Our work is justified from this perspective.

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There are many groups of Brethren in the United States and in Ontario and seven southern Manitoba churches that support Faith Bible Camp. See www.johndarby.org/beginning/index.html The Brethren Assemblies camp has continued to the present. In 2004, they celebrated their fiftieth anniversary. "Faith Bible Camp 50th Anniversary Celebration" information and registration brochure, 2004. When I attended Faith Bible Camp in the summers of 2003 and 2004, I was impressed by the strong simple faith of these people who affiliate with Brethren Assemblies. The extended Thomas and Monkman families were strongly represented, and were the backbone of the camp.

> fundamentalists and modernists which split body from soul and social service from evangelism was to come in the future.[545]

As Juhnke notes, General Conference missionaries to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi were holistic in their methods. To illustrate, Petter and his wife Marie gave medicine to sick Cheyenne and bought tent cloth with money donated by friends of the mission to distribute among the Cheyenne after a whirlwind destroyed their homes. In response an old Cheyenne man made the following speech, according to Petter:

> Friend, we Cheyennes men, warriors, children, wives are happy for your help of the sick, for medicines that you give. We the Cheyenne tribe say thank you to the strange distant friends for their love and their help when the whirlwind brought disaster to many families of our nation. We also thank those who have sent clothes to our children. We also thank you for pointing us to the good way of faith, since you are nearer to the great God than we are.[546]

However, Petter believed strongly that physical problems pointed to a deeper need which only Christ could address, so ministering to the spirit was of prime importance.[547] Although early MPM missionaries were concerned about social and economic problems, the Board stopped them from becoming involved. For example, when Unrau wanted to start a potato cooperative, the Board told him he should "stick to preaching the Gospel."[548] One facet of fundamentalism was emphasis on the inerrancy and literalism of the Bible with a strong preference for the King James version. Yet, at least one MPM missionary called this version "archaic." Otto Hamm saw the need for a revision of the Cree Bible, because "the constructions used in the translation [were] as archaic as the English in the King James version." Hamm's view is surprising, since

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[545]Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 10.

[546]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (30 July 1896): 1.

[547]*Christlicher Bundesbote* (23 May 1895): 1.

[548]Trudie Unrau, interview with Alvina Block, 5 March 2002.

most Mennonites were happy with the King James Bible in the 1950s.[549] Unrau and Hamm's openness demonstrates that missionaries were often far ahead of the constituency in their acceptance of holistic or new methods.

General Conference missionaries were more holistic in their methods than early MPM missionaries but, in contrast to their later northern counterparts, they thought Indians were a dying race. This idea came from the belief that Indians were on the lowest scale of evolution and were threatened by extinction when they met with the "superior" culture of Euro-Americans. But the idea of extinction also came from observation of the Indians' physical condition. Voth reported that at Darlington in 1887, only one-tenth of the Arapaho were healthy. He wrote: "They are dying out fast and before many years will have rolled by, they will have dwindled down to a small remnant. It may become the sad duty of our mission to sing the funeral songs of almost the last Arapahoes."[550] The belief that Indians were vanishing lent urgency to the task of American Mennonite missions in the late 1800s.[551] In contrast, later MPM missionaries knew that the Cree and Ojibwa were not threatened by extinction. The 1966 conference report noted that the Indian population had doubled in the last fifty years.[552]

We could conclude that MPM failed to learn from General Conference missionaries because they thought American Mennonites were too liberal. Indeed, American Mennonite churches were adopting changes that Canadian Mennonite churches could not endorse. By

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[549]Hamm, 15.

[550]*The Mennonite* (July 1887): 154.

[551]Juhnke, *A People of Mission,* 11. See also Grant, 222. Ironically, missionaries preserved the traditional ceremonies and rituals they wished to root out and replace with Christianity.

[552]*CMCY (1966)*: 33.

1948, American Mennonite church services were mostly in the English language, while in Canada most Mennonite churches held to the German language.[553] Yet, even though changes were taking place in General Conference churches, their methods and attitudes on the mission field did not change much in the first sixty years of their existence. It is likely that the differences between General Conference missions and MPM have to do

with different time frames and *Zeitgeists*. Other than the missionary's education, differences were caused by outer circumstances rather than by inner compulsion or consciously made decisions.

General Conference Mission (1880-1930) and MPM (1948-1980): Similarities

The most important similarity between General Conference Missions and MPM during their first years in their fields was their attitudes towards the Native peoples' religions. Both missions agreed that the people to whom they went were "heathen." A paper read by Petter at the 1912 General Conference demonstrated that General Conference missionaries' attitudes had not changed during the first 32 years. Petter referred to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi as "wild, uncivilized peoples" who had not reached the stage of culture and religious training to make them ready to receive God's message. He said they were crude people, "children of nature," "without culture, without history."[554] In Manitoba, an unknown author penned a trip

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The German language persisted in Canada because two more German-speaking waves of Mennonites emigrated from Russia to Canada in the 1920s and the 1940s to 50s, while the United States was closed to new immigrants at those times.

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Rudolphe Petter, "What Relation do the Indian Churches Sustain to our General Conference?" Supplement to *The Mennonite* (11 April 1912): 7-8.

report in 1957 in which he said the Pauingassi people were "culturally backward."[555] A German brochure published by MPM in 1958 for circulation in the constituency stated: *Die einzige Religion, die sie kennen, ist ihnen von ihren heidunischen Vorfahren ueberliefert worden.* [556] Authors of MPM publications and correspondence were less prone to call people of mixed ancestry "heathen," but they were convinced that the "Metis," as they called them, merely had a superficial religion, not genuine Christianity.

Both missions had as their primary goal to convert Native peoples and, by doing so, to replace their traditional religions with established Mennonite churches. In both American General Conference missions and the Manitoba MPM, the people to whom they went were highly resistant to Christianity, slow to accept the Gospel message. General Conference missionaries experienced what Lois Barrett has called "a small harvest."[557] In Manitoba, the story was similar. In 1963, the MPM Board told the Conference of Mennonites in Canada: *"Alle Konfessionen haben es schon erfahren, dass die Missionsarbeit unter Indianern nur langsam geht. Wir auch!"* [558]

General Conference missions to aboriginals and MPM had several weaknesses in common during the early years of their operations. Both gave priority to building mission compounds. Yet Native peoples were not used to gathering in special buildings to worship

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[555]MHC, Vol. 362, "Pauingassi Trip Report, 1957.

[556] *"Pauingassi Missions Station,"* MHC, Vol. 362, 1958. English translation: The only religion they know was passed on to them by their heathen ancestors.

[557]Barrett, 15.

[558] *CMCY* (1963): 86. All confessions have experienced that mission work among the Indians goes slowly. We too! The translation is by Barrett, 225.

God. For them, all of everyday life was connected with spirituality, not bound to a mission compound, but Mennonite missionaries, as had missionaries of other denominations before them, insisted on erecting churches and other buildings.

In the case of General Conference missionaries, mission compounds became a problem when the Cheyenne and Arapaho relocated. As early as 1905 the mission board reported to the conference that many of the Arapaho had moved away from Cantonment so the church building, the hospital, and the large school were of little use and had become a liability.[559] In Oraibi, many of the Hopi abandoned their homes on the mesa and moved down to where water was more accessible and government services were available, but the Mennonite mission church was on the mesa.[560]

Not only were mission compounds stationary, but they were also ostentatious and western in appearance, alien among Native dwellings. Polingaysi Qoyawayma, a Hopi woman, described the red stone church in Oraibi built by H.R. Voth as a "strange form" that "stood on the edge of the mesa beyond the flat-topped buildings, a foreign thing with not one feature to blend it with the village. It did not belong there. It was a thing to be ignored or to be looked at and rejected by the offended eyes of the Hopi."[561]

In Manitoba, MPM established mission stations where they thought the people were permanently settled. Yet when most of the Loon Straits people moved away in the 1960s, the buildings became a liability. Even before they moved away, the big new parsonage built for the Brandts caused hard feelings. In cold northern climates warm comfortable houses were

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[559]*Beilage zum Christlicher Bundesbote* (9 November 1905): 28-29.

[560]*Beilage zum Christlicher Bundesbote* (2 November 1911): 31.

[561]Qoyawayma, 38.

necessary, yet some missionary homes were too lavish and different from the homes in which the community lived. Malcolm Wenger observed in 1967 that too often, customs, organizations and architectures had been patterned after the "white man's religion" without taking into account the cultural ways and economic level of the area into which the missionary came.[562]

Another commonality was that Boards and constituencies in both countries gave priority to overseas missions after 1900. Preferential interest in Africa, India, and China had a detrimental effect on missions to American aboriginals. There was a waiting list of persons who wanted to be foreign missionaries, but few felt called to be missionaries to Native peoples in North America.[563] The Board and constituency, exercising customary Mennonite frugality and thrift, gave more personnel and financial backing to India, China, and Africa where they got better numerical results for time and money spent. The 1938 report included a statistical summary, comparing the different missions the General Conference was involved with. American Native Mennonite churches had 609 members, India had 1962, and China had 1467. The mission to North American Natives, begun twenty years earlier than the overseas mission program, had the least converts and became the poorest prospect for investment.[564]

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"North American Home Mission," (1967). Malcolm Wenger file, copy in the possession of Alvina Block.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1941): 90. See also Esther and Malcolm Wenger, 5-6. In his youth, Malcolm Wenger dreamed of going abroad because far-away missions seemed more romantic.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1938): 79.

In the 1930s, the General Conference made serious cutbacks in its American Indian missions budget. Petter attributed this financial reduction to a lack of constituency interest in the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Hopi.[565] Montana, Oklahoma, and Arizona missionaries "chafed against the comparisons with General Conference Mennonite missions overseas and "felt upstaged." The Foreign Mission Board, on the other hand, was frustrated and bewildered with the lack of growth in American Indian mission churches.[566]

In Manitoba, the constituency also found overseas missions more interesting and appealing. Moreover, far away missions did not present home churches with issues of changing ethnicity. Home churches did not have to confront relational problems, such as intermarriage, when converts were far away. To illustrate, Ike Froese said that in the 1970s, southern Manitoba Mennonite sugar beet farmers had Native people working for them, but it was impossible to begin a mission for these people because their work habits annoyed the Mennonites too much for evangelism to be effective. Thus mission at a distance was easier and more attractive than mission close at hand.[567]

Paternalism and ethnocentrism were a detriment to both American and Canadian missions. Jacob A. Loewen, a Mennonite Brethren anthropologist who had experience among South American Indians, stressed a level playing field for missionaries and people. Loewen found that when missionaries revealed that they were human, made mistakes, and failed, the

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565 *Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1933): 64-65. Of course, giving was down also because of the 1930s Depression and the relief efforts to Mennonites in Russia.

566 Barrett, 54.

567 Ike Froese, interview with Alvina Block, 22 March 2002. In 1972, 1,500 Indians worked in sugar beet fields around Altona. Barrett 230.

people to whom they ministered were quite open with their own problems. But in fact, often the opposite was happening.

Although many church members continued to have rigid ideas about mission outreach and Native peoples, a turning point took place in the sixties and seventies among MPM personnel through the insights of Executive Secretaries such as Menno Wiebe and missionaries such as Ernie Sawatzky. Wiebe, who became MPM Executive Director in 1964, took time off to complete a Master's thesis on "Specialization among the Northern Ojibwa" in 1973.[568] He introduced the Mennonite constituency to cross-cultural ideas. J.A. Loewen, who conducted sessions on "Cultural Change and Christian Mission" for MPM staff in 1967, also brought new insights to MPM.[569]

The ideas of anthropologists who were deeply involved with MPM in the 1960s began to have a trickle-down effect. Resolution 40 at the Conference of Mennonites in Canada held at Waterloo, Ontario in July 1972 stated: "Be it resolved that we encourage MPM and/or Conference Executive to initiate some kind of a consultation or study conference to come to terms with some of the issues of the religion and revelation of the natives."[570] That this resolution passed demonstrated a major change in Mennonite thought since 1948 when MPM sent Jacob and Trudie Unrau to Matheson Island as absolute truth bearers to people who had nothing to give. In the 1960s, however, the time was ripe for change, at least theoretically.

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See Menno Wiebe, "Specialization among the Northern Ojibwa: a peradigmatic process" (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1973).

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Bulletin (14 February 1967): 4. Loewen had done extensive studies of the cultures of South American Indians. See also Regehr, 337.

570 *CMCY* (1972): 20.

Positive changes continued into the 1970s. Ike Froese was Executive Secretary of MPM from 1970 to 1972 and again from 1974 to 1979. Froese had served in Oraibi under General Conference missions both as a teacher in the Hopi mission school and as lay pastor in one of the Hopi churches.[571] In his annual MPM report, Froese reflected on the changes that he thought should happen. He believed that God wanted reconciliation between different cultures and faiths just as he had broken down the walls between Jews and Gentiles.[572]

Froese recognized that Native people were moving to the city where they got an education and became more vocal. Some emerging Native leaders who were critical of the government's past unfair dealings and paternalistic attitudes were accusing the church of being an accomplice and were now calling for equality and justice. Froese continued:

> These signs of the times have not been lost on us. No one is more aware or has examined himself more closely than the MPM worker in the light of his assignment....We could not allow the credibility of the power of the Gospel to be questioned on the basis that we had only verbalized and did not possess the qualities of the Good Samaritan who in good neighborly fashion shared deeply in order to meet a stricken man's physical and material needs.[573]

Froese reported that MPM personnel now realized that there were some lessons they could learn from the people. The Native practice of "tak[ing] no thought for the morrow" and communal sharing was more biblical than the Mennonite way of hoarding material

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[571]See CV in Ike Froese file, copy in the possession of Alvina Block.

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Ephesians 2:14-16 (NEB): "For he is himself our peace. Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them; for he annulled the law with its rules and regulations, so as to create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace. This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body to God through the cross, on which he killed the enmity." Ike Froese, "A Transcultural Faith," *Totemak* (June 1973): 1.

[573]Ike Froese, " Mennonite Pioneer Mission," *Bulletin* (5 June 1970): 12-14.

possessions and fencing in private property.[574] Froese encouraged a shift away from doctrinal preaching toward practical Christianity, with the hope that people would be won in this way.

In the 1960s, after twenty years of existence, the Manitoba MPM had gained some awareness of past weaknesses and was working toward becoming more appreciative of Native history and culture. Those MPM personnel who were in constant contact with the Cree, Ojibwa, and people of mixed descent realized that they could be learners, not only teachers. In the United States, a turning point such as occurred in Manitoba did not come during the first decades of General Conference mission. Their methods and attitudes remained unchanged until the 1960s, eighty years after Native missions began.

American General Conference and Mennonite Pioneer/Native Ministries Attitudes toward Indigenization

Antonio Gualtieri defined indigenization as "the adaptation of the core message to cultural forms other than those originally associated with it."[575] If indigenization had occurred among Native churches begun by General Conference and MPM missionaries, Native converts could have expressed their Christian faith in their own ways rather than in Mennonite forms. But Petter vehemently opposed replacing Mennonite tunes with traditional Cheyenne music which, he said, were associated with "heathen and peyote people." He failed to realize that many Christian hymn tunes originated in the bar and that there was no special sacredness inherent in these tunes.[576]

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[574]*CMCY* (1969): 63-64.

[575]Gualtieri, 27.

[576]Barrett, 31.

Although they failed to let Native people use their own expressions of worship, early General Conference missionaries tried to foster Native leadership, at least in theory. In practice, they were more reluctant. As a result of their reluctance to trust Native Christians with the responsibilities of leadership, none of the churches in Oklahoma, Montana, or Arizona had Native leaders who were actually in charge of a church fifty years after the General Conference began mission work.

In Manitoba, early MPM Board and workers moved more deliberately in the direction of Native leadership than did their General Conference counterparts. Jeremiah Ross became the leader of the Elim Mennonite Church at Cross Lake in 1968 and Jacob, St. John, Spoot, and David Owen took charge of the Pauingassi Mennonite Church in 1972. The plan (at least for Menno Wiebe) was that in the future mission stations would gradually become full status churches in the conference.[577] These changes were less difficult for Board members and staff who were in contact with Native peoples. They could say: "In Christ the walls crumble. In Him language, culture and race seem to fade into the background."[578] But for Conference delegates who did not connect with Native peoples, these changes were hard to imagine.

Issues concerning Native mission stations, such as fostering more independence and decision making power for Native Christians and moving deliberately from the idea of mission stations to the formation of mission congregations, were raised at the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in the 1960s.[579] In the summer of 1966, the MPM Board recommended

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[577]Menno Wiebe, *Bulletin* (16 August 1966): 5.

[578]Henry P. Funk, "Cross Lake Ordination," *Bulletin* (12 March 1968): 6. Funk was Chairman of the Mission Board in 1968.

[579]*Bulletin* (12 April 1966): 3.

to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada "that the Mennonite Pioneer Mission Fellowships and Home Missions churches be encouraged to send fraternal or regular delegates to the provincial and Canadian conferences." The resolution carried.[580]

Bringing the 1966 resolution into practice raised some interesting issues. When Native delegates from Manigotagan, Cross Lake, and Pauingassi represented their churches, conferences became less ethnically homogeneous in character. Languages such as Cree and Ojibwe were added to German and English, so conference sessions needed translators and interpreters. Native speakers raised problems that had previously been ignored. Isaac Beaulieu, Executive Secretary-treasurer for the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood who spoke at the 1969 CMC Conference, told the delegates that the name "Mennonite Pioneer Mission" reflected a paternalistic attitude.[581] Native representatives who made speeches did not observe the tight time schedules of non-Native Mennonites. The thumping beat of their music was discordant to southern Manitoba Mennonite ears. As well, there was danger that Native converts could become exhibits at conferences as "the fruit of [missionary] labors." Menno Wiebe warned that such "an unhealthy paternalism" would negate the "notion of brotherhood."[582]

A litany of confession, read by the MPM Board during an evening commemorating MPM's twenty-fifth anniversary at the 1970 Winkler Conference, demonstrated that MPM missionaries and Board were aware of their paternalism and control. Included in the litany were the following confessions to Native people who were in the audience:

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[580]*CMCY* (1966): 5.

[581]Ike Froese, "An Indian Speaks," *Bulletin* (22 August 1969): 17.

[582]*Bulletin* (4 September 1970): 9.

> ...We have wanted you as converts but we weren't sure that we wanted you as brothers...We have erred where we have poured our energies and anxieties into doing things instead of listening and learning, where principles, policies, programs, and right theology took priority over you the people....Where you have been the object of competitive mission ventures, each denomination claiming monopoly on God's truth...We are ashamed, Lord.[583]

In 1973, to reflect new ways of doing missions and in response to Beaulieu's earlier plea, Wiebe suggested that MPM change its name to "Native Ministries" (NM) to bring Indian and Metis congregations to an equal status with other Mennonite congregations. Wiebe wrote:

> Now Indian and Metis congregations wish to be fellow congregations. No longer do they want to be missions. As a people they wish to be acknowledged specifically as native people with their own history and tradition. But they also wish to be identified with us, the larger brotherhood–the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. For these reasons MPM proposes that we seek to do some upgrading. We would like to graduate mission stations into congregations, missionaries to pastors. No longer do we want to pose as pioneers of "uninhabited" territories but as brothers of parallel (not superior) cultures. Consequently we suggest that the name of our program be changed from Mennonite Pioneer Mission to Native Ministries.[584]

The actual name change took place in 1975.

These expressions of change no doubt reflected the attitudes of those missionaries and Board members who had been in contact with Native converts and had learned to know them. Yet it is doubtful that these views were shared by most non-Native Mennonite church members who were not acquainted with their fellow church members on the reserves of northern Manitoba. Fred Unruh, NM Board Chairman in 1976, reported that by being in closer relationship with Native peoples, the romanticism of distance was fading, but most Mennonites still needed to overcome prejudices.[585] In 1978, the Native Ministries report to the conference

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[583]*Bulletin* (4 September 1970): 10.

[584]Menno Wiebe, "Mennonite Pioneer Mission," *Bulletin* (28 May 1973): 11.

[585]*Bulletin* (30 May 1976): 24-25.

took the form of a slide presentation called "We May Be Brothers After All." Clarence Nepinak, an Ojibwa living in Winnipeg, had been asked to respond. After making a "plea for acceptance and love" he was overwhelmed by the large Mennonite audience and "fled the stage." Malcolm Wenger observed that Nepinak's "agony served as an indicator that all [was] not well in Indian-Mennonite relationships."[586]

In 1976, Neill and Edith von Gunten began a ministry based in Riverton, sixty miles north of Winnipeg. From that base they visited Matheson Island, Pine Dock, and Loon Straits. One reason for this new style of ministry was to encourage local leadership, with NM personnel serving only in an advisory capacity.[587] A Native person told the von Guntens that it was important to listen carefully because new converts would not say much. The von Guntens concluded that it was through listening to Native voices in daily life that NM could become a joint venture between southern Mennonites and Native converts of northern Manitoba.[588]

From a Native perspective, change was happening too slowly. Stan McKay, a Cree United Church minister responded to a paper by Malcolm Wenger in 1978 with the following words:

> Native people are on the fringe of society, just as the `praying towns' of Massachusetts were on the fringe. There was a fear of our differences then and this fear continues to be a factor. Leaders for our churches are still usually imported and that is a kind of aggression. It is a kind of paternalism, racism and colonialism. We have our spiritual people within the community of faith and you could help us become better leaders.[589]

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[586]Totemak (July-August 1978): 7.

[587]von Gunten, 328.

[588]*Bulletin* (May 1983): 30-31.

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Stan McKay, "A Response to `Some Reflections on Native Ministries,'" 30 June 1978. See also Malcolm Wenger, "Some Reflections on Native Ministries," 1978. Both documents are in the Ike Froese file.

General Conference and Mennonite Pioneer/Native Ministries Attitudes toward Syncretism

Syncretism is likely to arise wherever old beliefs are complemented with new ones. Vittorio Lanternari and many others have studied messianic cults that have sprung up spontaneously in Africa, North and South America, Melanesia, Polynesia, Asia, and Indonesia as a result of cultural, social, and economic crises. These new cults combined elements of both traditional religions and the white man's Christianity on a foundation of indigenous belief and practice.[590] Alfred Siemens, a graduate student who spent time on the Hopi reservation in 1961, observed that "it is not easy to give up a world view, in fact it is doubtful if it can ever be completely given up, especially if it has been part of one's whole world of experience since childhood."[591]

American General Conference missionaries encountered syncretism in the form of the Ghost Dance and the Peyote ceremony. Voth recognized the Ghost Dance as an opportunity to build bridges but he did not follow through. Petter did not make connections between new Native ceremonies and Christianity. In his view, the Cheyenne needed to be shown that their traditional religion was useless. United States General Conference missionaries did not accept the Peyote ceremony, though it incorporated many aspects of Christianity. Haury, Voth and Petter were not willing to build upon commonalities between Christianity and traditional religions, or even religious innovations that blended Christianity with Native versions of religion. However, the Cheyenne and Arapaho did not make sharp distinctions between

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Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messsianic Cults*, trans. from Italian, (New York: Alfred A. Knopff, Inc., 1963), vi-vii. See also Scott Peterson, *Native American Prophecies*, 2d ed. (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999).

[591]Alfred Siemens, "Christ and Culture in the Mission Field," *Mennonite Life* (April 1962): 85.

Christianity and the Peyote Road. Many Cheyenne preferred to follow two roads, the Peyote Road and the Christian Road.[592] In fact, in Montana, sermons written by Rodolphe Petter were occasionally read during Peyote ceremonies. The Peyote ceremony included many Christian symbols such as the cross, the dove, the Trinity, and the Bible. Peyote followers believed that when Christ promised to send a Comforter to his followers after he left, he fulfilled his promise by sending Peyote exclusively for all Indians, but not for the white man.[593] The Native American Church, the organized church where the Peyote ceremony was practiced, was recognized by the states of Oklahoma, Utah, Colorado, and Nevada in 1918.[594] Its leaders taught that alcohol and tobacco should be avoided and

that brotherly love, strong family ties, and self-reliance were important. Yet the Mennonite missionaries saw the Peyote ceremony as a curse.[595]

General Conference missionaries to the Arapaho and Cheyenne in the late 1800s and early 1900s were not accepting of indigenous expressions of religion, but missionaries to the Hopi were even more insensitive. H.R. Voth barged into kivas where he was not wanted so that he could undermine Hopi religion, even though at one time he later expressed admiration for it. Voth built the Hopi church in the path of the traditional kachina dance. When the church was struck by lightning, the Hopi took it as a sign that the kachinas were more powerful than

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[592]Dyck, 201.

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Lanternari, 82. However, Omer C. Stewart points out that there are some variations in the way different tribes conduct peyote ceremonies. Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 31, 226.

[594]Weston LaBarre, *The Peyote Cult* (Archer Books, 1975), 217.

[595]Barrett, 60.

Voth's God. In the early years of General Conference activities in Indian Territory and in Arizona, missionaries were rigid in what they perceived to be truth, not allowing for integration of traditional religion with Christianity.[596]

In Manitoba, the Ojibwa, Cree, and peoples of mixed ancestry had encountered other denominations from the mid nineteenth century onward. Around the Berens River and surrounding areas, many Ojibwa had responded positively to the Methodists' and Oblates' versions of Christianity before MPM came. The Ojibwa had integrated Christianity into their world view, but Christianity had not entirely replaced traditional Ojibwa religion.[597]

At Cross Lake, Otto Hamm described the synthesis of religions in 1956 thus:

> At one time this was a United Church territory. Then the Roman Catholics came in and have almost done a complete job of it. Now we have come. What does it mean to the religious native? On top of his old pagan superstitions he has now placed United Church baptism and communion, Roman Catholic beads and images, and what kind of charm we are going to hand out they don't know yet.[598]

Hamm was convinced that the Cree still believed strongly in evil spirits.[599] Five years later, Hamm wrote that "The Bible till a few years ago, has been a charm to have in the house to ward off evil; or to carry next to your heart."[600]

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Walter Franz, interview with Alvina Block, 21 May 2002. The Hopi believed that the kachinas lived on the peaks of the San Francisco mountains and came from the spirit world. They appeared in the villages during the Soyal ceremony and again in midsummer. They were respected spirits of the dead and they brought blessing to the people and water for their fields. Waters, 202-212.

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Susan Elaine Gray, "The Ojibwa World Vision and Encounters with Christianity along the Berens River, 1875-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 1996).

[598]MHC, Volume 280, Hamm to Gerbrandt, 16 July 1957.

[599]MHC, Volume 280, Hamm to Gerbrandt, 16 July 1957.

[600]Hamm, 19.

Some MPM missionaries, such as Ernie Sawatzky, began to realize that they had to accept what they could not change, even if they could not view it in a positive light. He observed that Native people were willing to accept new technology, medicine, and ideas but they were not as willing to replace their religious views. Indians, wrote Sawatzky, had no problem integrating opposing world views.

> The Indian has never been especially interested in a tidy or systematic universe. He is not bothered by what we call logical contradiction....No one worries about whether it is logical to sing hymns at an otherwise pagan wake, or whether it is logical to recite the Lord's Prayer to placate the spirits....There is often an addition or syncretism which fits perfectly well with the Indian's view of a not necessarily systematic universe. Thus it is easy for him later to slop into paganism again, especially under stress. This is what has happened to earlier Roman Catholics and to some more recent Protestant work, in which Indians have turned away from Protestantism after years of careful instruction in what the missionary thought were the fundamentals of the faith. But as it turns out, these fundamentals were not nearly as relevant to the concerns of the Indian as was supposed.[601]

It is interesting to note that Sawatzky gave credit to Roman Catholics and other Protestants for good work done, something other MPM personnel had not done. "Christian ideas," continued Sawatzky, were being "superimposed on old ones." Converts often changed outwardly while keeping basic religious concepts intact. Native peoples were inclined to absorb new ideas without relinquishing their traditional beliefs. That explains Hamm's observation that the Cree used the Bible as a charm.

As at Cross Lake, Pauingassi Ojibwa had been in contact with missionaries before MPM came. Syncretism was evident as early as the 1930s, when anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell visited the Berens River area. Fair Wind, a Pauingassi Ojibwa who was famous for a powerful drum dance that was said to have extraordinary healing powers, told Hallowell how

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MHC, Volume 358, Sawatzky to Hamm, no date given but likely September 1964 as it is written in response to a note left by Hamm called "Things to Think About." Sawatzky's analysis seems to refute confusion resulting from different denominations.

he had received his gift. After his favorite grandson died, Fair Wind had been completely dejected, ready to give up. He journeyed into the bush, hoping to find a cure for his despondency. He lay down on a rock and "gave himself up" to his spirit helper, after which he received the gift of the healing dream dance.[602] Fair Wind's experience on the rock is similar to a conversion experience. He gave himself up because he had reached the end of what he could do through his own efforts. His life took a new direction guided by a higher power. Fair Wind's son, Angus, had a similar experience. When his brother's son died, Angus went north to hunt and to obtain healing for his sadness. He also heard a voice that promised him a gift. Angus, however, did not attribute his gift to a spirit helper. He told Hallowell that the gift he received came from God, not from a spirit helper.[603]

Hallowell observed that when Fair Wind performed the drum dance ceremony he began with an offering of sweet grass or tobacco to keep out negative spirit beings and to welcome positive spirit beings. Fair Wind also offered dishes of food to relatives "who look down upon us" (those who had died). He said they had once been sent to earth from above and that "Jesus, too, came from above to be the boss of the earth." Adam Owen, Fair Wind's grandnephew, said that Fair Wind used to call people to worship on Sundays by ringing a bell and then "praying from a Cree syllabic Bible."[604] In many ways, Fair Wind's experiences and activities incorporated both Native and Christian religions collected from intermittent

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[602]Matthews and Roulette, 340.

[603]Matthews and Roulette, 350.

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Matthews and Roulette, 336 note 1, 350-351. This bell was hanging in the Mennonite chapel at Pauingassi in the 1990s. According to oral tradition, it was stolen long ago from a tractor train that brought freight to Pauingassi. Henry and Elna Neufeld, interview with Alvina Block, 19 February 1999.

missionary influence among the Ojibwa east of Berens River from the time of the Methodist missionary Egerton R. Young's visits in the 1870s until the sojourn of United Church missionary Luther Schuetze in the 1930s.

Henry Neufeld, MPM missionary, observed many examples of syncretism at Pauingassi between 1955 and 1970. One example was a child's funeral in 1956. Parents and friends prepared a box-like casket lined with white linen and decorated with flowers. The oldest Indian and a councillor spoke and chanted. George Groening, then chairman of MPM who happened to be at Pauingassi, also spoke. After the child was buried, the family built a house over the grave, the community had a drum-dance, and home-brew was distributed.[605] The funeral was a mixture of Ojibwa, Christian, and secular western rituals and customs.

In 1955, there were many evidences of religious changes taking place at Pauingassi. The school building was situated on a site previously used for drumming and dancing. Alex Owen supervised the burial of special rocks from the dancing area in 1957. The 1930s medicine lodge where Fair Wind and his four sons had conducted healing ceremonies was also dismantled. Charlie George Owen told Neufeld: "My father is gone and the *Waapanoowin*[606] practice is a thing of the past. I too used to be a part of it at one time, but not any more. I will take my father's tools and dispose of them in the bush."[607]

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[605]George Groening, "An Indian funeral," *MPMQ* (April 1956): 3-4.

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The *Wabinowinin* was a superstructure in which dances took place on specially prepared ground. This seems to have been a successor of the *Midewiwin* or Medicine Lodge which was "a ceremonial organization concerned with curing." See Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of Berens River*, 9-11.

[607]Henry and Elna Neufeld, 3.

On the other hand, Native religious practices and world views were still alive and well. A pole stood at the edge of the water, with flag-like bands of material and a strip of hide taken from a bear cub's nose. The Ojibwa erected these poles to honour the bear thus ensuring successful future hunting. They hung ribbons and tobacco on the poles as offerings and tied bundles of bones together, placing them behind their homes to return something from the hunt so that the gods would be appeased.[608]

In 1960, St. John Owen struggled with an illness that he thought was caused by a spell that had been placed on him. When he became concerned about his health he asked Neufeld to pray for him. In Ojibwa thought, illness was often attributed to sorcery, or taboos broken in the past. The victim was probably responsible because he had offended the sorcerer (shaman) or one of the animal bosses or had committed a wrongful act.[609] In their 1961 prayer letter, Henry and Elna wrote, "St. John has by trusting the Lord overcome a great deal of the spell that was drummed on him 3 ½ years ago, but it seems that something still is there at times."[610]

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Henry and Elna Neufeld, 3. See also Sam Gill, *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982), 117. Gill writes about bear ceremonialism among the Saulteaux, an old religious practice. Offerings of ribbons and tobacco were hung on a pole to show respect for the captured bear.

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A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Teachings from the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy*, eds. Dennis and Barbara Tedlock, (New York: Liveright, 1975) 170. Thus when the Ojibwa were sick they asked: "Who did this? Who is responsible?"

[610]MHC, Vol. 362, Henry and Elna Neufeld to "Dear Praying Friends," January 1961.

Fears such as St. John experienced were common among the Ojibwa.[611] Of course, all of this was before any Pauingassi Ojibwa were converted and baptized by Neufeld.

Yet syncretism was still evident much later, when in the 1990s Charlie George Owen, Fair Wind's grandson and a staunch pillar in the Mennonite Church, told visitors on several occasions about his grandfather's drum dance ceremony.[612] According to Neufeld, Charlie George had his own story to tell which paralleled Fair Wind's and Angus Owen's stories. One day when Charlie George was out on the trap line, his son committed suicide. After Charlie George returned home and saw his son's body, he went back to the trap line. There he had a vision of "a being coming in and it was dark." Then again "a being came in and it was light." Charlie George went home, asked the leaders to pray for him, and became a Christian.[613] Charlie George also told of a powerful experience of dying and being brought back to life by his grandfather's drum dance.[614]

There is abundant evidence that Pauingassi Ojibwa Christians kept major components of their traditional belief system. Spoot Owen, one of the four Mennonite leaders, said: "I never thought that all of the past [was] wrong."[615] He likely meant that even though he had

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See Jennifer S.H. Brown, "'A Place in Your Mind for Them All": Chief William Berens'" in *Being and Becoming Indian*, ed. J.A. Clifton (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989), 204-216. Brown tells the story of Chief William Berens of Berens River who, although he was a "member of a converted Methodist family," believed that pieces of metal removed from his knee had come to be there through the magical powers of an enemy.

[612]Matthews and Roulette, 334.

[613]Henry and Elna Neufeld, interview with Alvina Block, 19 February 1999.

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Matthews and Roulette, 341. Interestingly, Jeremiah Ross's conversion experience at Cross Lake was similar to Charlie George's story. Ross also went into the bush before his ordination.

[615]Henry and Elna Neufeld, interview with Alvina Block, 19 February 1999.

become a Christian, he still held precious the traditions of his ancestors, which he never had considered wrong.

Like Sawatzky at Cross Lake, Henry and Elna Neufeld became more open to various different practices in time. They found that the Ojibwa had been a very spiritual people even before they came. This discovery likely came gradually, as they learned to know the Ojibwa, their language, and their belief system and as they dialogued with them. They learned, with time, that Ojibwa faith and culture were inseparable. A hunting people's very livelihood was intricately connected with religious ceremony.

Mennonite anthropologist J. A. Loewen believed that missionaries should be thoroughly acquainted with a people's myths in which the culture's "basic values, ideals, beliefs, and fears" were embedded. in order to better deal with syncretism. Myths were the "*Anknuepfungspunkte*" or "pegs of known truth upon which the new message [could] be meaningfully hung." Loewen advocated that Native legends and stories should be openly addressed, discussed, and built upon in order to make lasting Christians. A lack of overt missionary awareness led to Native covert practice of traditional beliefs and a "Christopagan world" view. Knowledge and open discussion of myths were absolutely necessary in order to avoid "the pitfalls of misinterpretation and syncretism."[616] Loewen believed that Native culture should not be eradicated and that Christianity could flourish within that culture. All cultures, including the missionary's cultures, were merely "imperfect wrappers" into which the gospel could fit."[617] Loewen emphasized the concept of cultural relativism; no culture was

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Jacob A. Loewen, "Myth as an Aid to Missions," *Practical Anthropology* (July-August 1969), 185-192. It is interesting to note, however, that even an open-minded anthropologist, such as Loewen, was opposed to syncretism.

[617]Loewen, *Culture and Human Values*, xiii.

superior to another, only different. All cultures were in need of God's judgment, including western culture.[618] The Gospel could be present in indigenous as well as in Mennonite expressions.

Although they preceded Loewen, seminary-trained American General Conference missionaries were well acquainted with Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi myths. Both Voth and Petter looked for *Anknuepfungspunkte*, points where they could make connections between traditional religions and Christianity. In contrast, the first MPM missionaries knew little about Ojibwa and Cree myths. However, neither General Conference nor MPM missionaries were open to accepting syncretic practices of Native Christians during their early years.

Yet, syncretic practices were prevalent. In 1969 Susan Hiebert, a Mennonite, interviewed Robert Houle, a 21 year old Saulteaux Indian, a second year arts student at the University of Manitoba. The interview was a part of an effort for Mennonites to understand Native people and was published in a special periodical to be circulated in the constituency. When Hiebert asked Houle "How do you accept Christianity?" he answered:

> I think the Catholics should not have taught my ancestors that our religion was bad. They used to call for confessions after sun dances, etc. They outlawed all our old ways and confused us. They should have tried to understand us. Our religion has lived on through the years, because it is a philosophy and a way of life. Christianity does not conflict, it adds to it. Our religion makes us live in harmony with what God has created.[619]

Houle accused Catholics of trying to eradicate traditional religion, but his message applied to Mennonite missionaries as well. Native Christians would not easily give up their whole belief system.

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[618]Loewen, 102.

[619]In a special issue of the *Bulletin* called "The Church and the Original Canadians" (1969): 21. Houle subsequently became a high profile artist.

That it was almost impossible for Native Christians to give up a world of experience and history was a fact that Mennonites, both in the United States and Canada, could not accept in the past, and still find difficult. Gerbrandt thought that when the Ojibwa converted, they left Native rituals behind them. For example, Charlie George Owen left the drum dance behind and St. John Owen was released from his curse.[620] Yet this did not signify that the Owens became any less Ojibwa. In 1996 Charlie George Owen, then a Mennonite church member, still thought Fair Wind's drum had power.[621] Ike Froese said that the Mennonite community feared syncretism because they feared condoning Native beliefs. The 1979 Study Commission (see below) was a response to this fear. Syncretism, said Froese, waters down the Gospel. Froese continued that when K.T. Johnson, the last Hopi high priest became a Christian he burned his ceremonial altar, declaring closure on Hopi religion. Froese approved of such destruction.[622]

In 1972, the May *Bulletin* featured a picture of dancers in full regalia with a caption stating that Mennonites needed to acknowledge that Native religions and art forms were "authentic expressions of the Algonquian faith in the Kitchi Manitou."[623] In 1975, Fred Unruh, then MPM Board Chairman, asked: "Is it true to say that traditional rituals of the Native

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[620] Henry Gerbrandt, interview with Alvina Block, 10 February 2002.

[621] See Matthews and Roulette, 348.

[622] Ike Froese, interview with Alvina Block, 22 March 2002. Walter Franz, Director of Native Ministry in 2002, agreed that Mennonites still feared syncretism. Menno Wiebe's opinion was that the Mennonite religious system could become more accepting as they began to understand Native people. Menno Wiebe, interview with Alvina Block, 13 March 2002.

[623] *Bulletin* (26 May 1972): 19. The pictures and text were submitted by Menno Wiebe.

people, like the pow wow dance or the drum, are completely evil?"[624] In 1979, Ernie Sawatzky wrote an article beginning with the premise that God had "revealed himself to all people in all places." Since Native peoples did not have the Bible, God revealed himself to them through nature, his creation. Sawatzky also claimed that Native people had one God, "the Great Holy Mystery," who was, in fact, the same God worshiped by Christians. Yet there were differences–Christians believed in an accessible, personal God while Native peoples were in awe of a God far above them. Christianity was exclusive while Native religion was accommodating of other beliefs.[625]

In 1978, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada appointed a five member commission to grapple with these and other related issues related to Native Ministries. The commission sent questionnaires to past and present NM Board members, NM/MPM workers, and provincial and Canadian Conference delegates. One question was whether "the NM program [had] achieved the right balance between caring for the soul and caring for the body." Of the 38 Board members who received a questionnaire, only 19 responded. Ten answered that the right balance had been achieved, while seven felt that "the program was not evangelistic enough."[626] Board members also felt that the most serious failure of MPM/NM was that "not enough churches had been established." Of the 100 persons who had worked for MPM/NM, 38 returned the questionnaires. Fifteen felt that the right balance had been achieved between ministering to spiritual and physical needs, while six felt balance had not

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[624]*Bulletin* (30 May 1975): 16.

[625]Ernie Sawatzky, "Native and Biblical Concepts of God," *Totemak* (November-December 1979): 2-3. Ojibwa and Cree cosmology, however, included many spiritual beings with whom communication occurred through dreams and the shaking tent.

[626]The survey report does not say how the other two Board members responded.

been achieved.[627] Questionnaires were distributed to 1,500 delegates, who represented the constituency, at the 1978 conference. Fifty-seven percent of these forms were returned. On the question about finding a balance between ministering to soul and body, 299 delegates responded affirmatively while 61 responded negatively and 301 did not know. Both Board and missionaries were very much aware of the change to a more holistic emphasis during the last years, while delegates were not aware of it.[628]

The survey pointed to the fact that the constituency needed to become more informed about the activities of Native Ministries. It demonstrated strongly that some Board members were inclined toward fundamentalism while at least some of the missionaries were beginning to lean toward a more social gospel approach. The Executive Secretary was caught between the missionaries on the one hand and the more conservative Board members and constituency on the other.

The 1979 survey results showed variance between opinions of missionaries, who were in direct contact with the Native peoples, and the Board and constituency, who had little contact, were not informed, and did not understand the situation. This was evident in issues of indigenization and syncretism. Of the three groups surveyed, most Mennonites were in favor of Native leadership. Although many of those surveyed favored Native leadership they did not know how to implement it. Workers felt strongly that there was much that Mennonites could learn from Native people. However, the survey revealed that Board members and delegates did not understand "the Indian" nor did they see the importance of doing so. Only six out of

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[627]Again, the survey does not say how the other 17 persons answered the question.

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"Study Commission Report on Native Ministries," (1979), 2-3. In Ike Froese file, in possession of Alvina Block Commission members were Peter Letkemann, Adolf Enns, Walter Franz, David Schroeder, and Peter Falk.

eighteen board members surveyed thought that Mennonites could "learn theological insights from the native people." [629]

Board and constituency response was at variance with workers regarding more Native cultural expressions in worship services. Workers felt that Board members were uninformed and too far removed to understand Native peoples. They cautioned against insensitive church planting strategies and advocated Native leadership and involvement of Native Christians in all decision making.[630] The Executive Secretary often stood between the workers at the forefront and the Board and constituency who lagged behind. Workers knew the expectations of the Native community and defended the Native perspective. The constituency, however, moved much more slowly.[631] Stan McKay evaluated the work of Native Ministries with his own observations from a Native perspective. His conclusion was that "the work...has not been done at the constituency level and until it is there can be no peace; only pain on the cross-cultural front and a sense of security in the churches."[632]

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[629]Study Commission Report on Native Ministries, 1979.

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Study Commission Report on Native Ministries, 1979, in Ike Froese file in the possession of Alvina Block. Out of thirty-eight persons who had served on the MPM Board between 1968 and 1978, 19 questionnaires were returned. Out of 100 past and present MPM/NM workers, 38 questionnaires were returned, representing 53 persons (likely because they came from couples). Out of 1,500 delegates who received questionnaires at the Canadian Conference in 1978, 57 percent were returned.

[631]Ike Froese, interview with Alvina Block, 22 March 2002.

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Stan McKay, "Native Ministries Evaluation," June 1979. In Ike Froese file. By "security in the churches," McKay likely means a sense of complacency that the churches had been somehow involved in mission to aboriginal people and had done their duty.

Did changes that were taking place at the workers' level eventually have a permanent effect on the relationships and attitudes of Mennonite churches toward Native Christians? In the next chapter, I will evaluate the missions of the General Conference in the United States and Native Ministries in Manitoba, bringing their histories into the present.

Chapter Eight

The American General Conference Mission (1930-2000) and Manitoba Native Ministries (1980-2000): Their Later Phases Compared

American General Conference Mission: Congregations and Memberships

In chapter three, I described the early years of General Conference missions to the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi. In 1930 General Conference missions to Oklahoma, Montana, and Arizona had been operating for fifty years. What were the results after these five decades? Had methods and attitudes changed since the days of Samuel Haury, H.R. Voth, and Rodolphe Petter? If not, when did changes come to these mission stations? And what parallels may be drawn with Manitoba Mennonite missions?

The General Conference did not meet in 1930 but according to the 1929 report, there were five Native Mennonite congregations in Oklahoma. The four Cheyenne churches were located at Longdale (formerly Cantonment), Clinton, Fonda, and Hammon while one Arapaho church was at Canton with its outstation at Thomas. These congregations had a total of 275 Mennonite church members.[633] The 1933 conference minutes show a net total of 560 Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho converts, which looks like an increase of 285. However, upon closer examination this total, unlike that for 1929,

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The conference met triennially in the 1950s, but earlier reports do not fall into that pattern. See Ed G. Kaufman, "General Conference Mennonite Church," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II: 467. The 275 church members seem to be living members since they are referred to in the present tense. *Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1929): 112-113, 117.

included converts who had died or been dismissed. Actual living membership was 307, an increase of 32.[634]

Of the three General Conference Native missions (Oklahoma, Montana, and Arizona), Montana, begun in 1904, was the fastest growing mission field because the Petters already knew the Cheyenne language when they came to Montana from Oklahoma in 1916. In 1929, Montana had four Mennonite mission stations–Birney, Lame Deer, Busby, and Ashland, with a total of 300 church members, including the deceased.[635] In 1933 there were 345 church members, including the deceased.[636]

Arizona, in 1929, had three Mennonite churches, Oraibi, Hotevilla and Moen Copi with a total membership of 32. Although H.R. Voth and Christian Krehbiel, on their first visit to Oraibi in 1893, thought the Hopi would be more receptive to the Gospel than the Arapaho and Cheyenne,[637] this was not the case. The Hopi proved to be particularly resistant to Christianity. One scholar blames Hopi resistance on "worsening environmental and socio-political conditions" which "strengthened the Hopi commitment to maintaining ceremonial

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 69-70. Such reporting shows that General Conference Board and missionaries were desperate to appear successful to the constituency. Reports sometimes refer to baptized converts while at other times they refer to church members, so it is difficult to tell how large the organized churches actually were. Perhaps baptized converts and church members were synonymous.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1929): 114-117. Gustav and Anna Hirschler Lindscheid were the first missionaries in Montana. Petters followed in 1916 with others in between. Barrett, 33.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 65-67.

637 *Christlicher Bundesbote* (9 February 1893): 1.

ritual in order to restore harmony."[638] The few early Hopi converts were mostly women.[639] Alfred Siemens, a Mennonite graduate student who visited the Hopi in 1961, observed that traditionally Hopi women dominated their households, owned their lands, and headed their kinship groups while Hopi men were the heads of ceremonial cycles, the focal points of the community. But Siemens observed:

> The Christian ideal of a patriarchal society threatens to reverse this arrangement in a Hopi household. The appeal of Christianity to the woman as well as to the man destroys ancient prerogatives and tips the balance in favor of the woman, who obtains an access to religious practices while usually retaining the kinship dominance. The man, on the other hand, loses his area of dominance without gaining another to replace it. This seems to be the main reason why such a large percentage of those attending worship services and becoming church members are women.[640]

Diane Notarianni's doctoral thesis argues that patriarchal Mennonite missionaries tried to convert individual men, but Hopi men were too communally minded to accept Christianity. If they had left their kivas, they would have had to leave all of Hopi life, because their "religion was at the center of their daily lives."[641] Doubtless it was more difficult for Hopi men to give

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[638]Trotta, 153.

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Reports of Cheyenne and Arapaho missions do not specify whether converts were male or female so they likely were both. Otto Hamm had the same problem at Cross Lake. Converts there were mostly women because Hamm did home visitation while the men were away hunting. In contrast, when Sawatzky began to go into the bush with the hunters, more men converted and joined the church.

[640]Siemens, 85-86.

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The ideas in Notarianni's thesis are discussed by Cynthia Snider, "Missionaries came to Hopi with wrong assumptions," in *Canadian Mennonite* (24 November 1997): 24.

up their memberships in ceremonial societies and convert to the Mennonite church than it was for Hopi women who had little part in secret kiva rituals.[642]

In 1935, the General Conference passed a resolution "that the Native churches on our mission fields be invited to become members of the General Conference." Two Oklahoma mission churches applied and were received as members of the General Conference.[643] Theoretically, they were now on equal standing with other Mennonite churches. Practically, however, these churches could not support themselves financially and their leading ministers were non-Native missionaries. In 1912, Petter had presented a paper to the General Conference titled: "What Relation do the Indian Churches Sustain to our General Conference?" He stated:

> The fact is plain that our Indian churches in their present condition cannot be left to support and govern themselves. They have not reached the age of maturity, hence cannot be considered sister churches by our General Conference....For this reason, our Indian churches should be considered foster children, daughters of our Conference, for they will remain such still for many years to come.[644]

Petter's prediction proved to be correct.

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Hopi women were members of societies that performed at the end of the annual ceremonial cycle and depicted fruition. However they were not members in the Wuwuchim, Soyal, Powamu, Kachina, Flute, or Snake-Antelope, the major societies. See Waters, 230-291.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1935): 27. Only one Arapaho mission station (Canton) remained with the Mennonites. The remaining stations had been given to other denominations, apparently because Mennonite missionaries had been unable to learn the Arapaho language. *Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1935): 69-71.

644 In *Supplement to The Mennonite* (11 April 1912): 10-11.

Native Leadership

Each of the Oklahoma Mennonite churches had two native helpers in 1929. Church historian Lois Barrett claims that some of the congregations were almost completely under Native leadership but minutes of the General Conference sessions do not support her statement. In 1929, none of the churches was actually led by Cheyenne or Arapaho leaders. The Arapaho Canton church had been under Native leadership from 1911 until 1923, but this arrangement was not satisfactory to the Mennonites. They sent missionary H.T. Neufeld to Canton in 1923 to take over since, according to conference minutes, the station had been "insufficiently manned" by a Native helper so that Neufeld had to do repair work and correct neglect.[645]

On the whole, the Mission Board did not trust Native leaders and gave them limited responsibilities or put them in charge only when there was no white Mennonite missionary to fill the position. General Conference missionaries, board, and constituency expected that the Oklahoma churches would become responsible, self-governing, and self-supporting quickly. Yet the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho who had the capabilities to be leaders could not live up to standards that the missionaries set for them so they felt inferior, according to H.J. Kliewer, missionary at Canton since 1927. His report continued: "Even though they have been born to new life, they feel that to assume leadership under the present conditions is but to court failure." Personally, Kliewer thought it was time to give the churches more responsibility under supervision. The congregations would then "either rise to the occasion in spite of

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See *Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1923): 239 and (1929): 112-113. See also Barrett, 26-27.

grievous failings, and show forth the life that is within them, or they would disintegrate.[646] In Montana in 1929, six Northern Cheyenne leaders, converts who might have become church leaders if they had been given a chance, helped in translation, preaching, and teaching the Bible to children in the government school. Although there were Native helpers in most of the General Conference mission stations, the missionaries remained in charge.

Fred Johnson, a Hopi leader under supervision in 1929, was perhaps the exception. In 1933, he was in charge of the Moen Copi mission station in Arizona, and in 1935 he was ordained.[647] The Hopi leader Daniel Schirmer was in charge of the Hotevilla mission station in Arizona in 1941. Both Johnson and Schirmer had attended the Indian Bible Institute in Los

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 68.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 72, (1935): 80. Both Barrett (*Vision and Reality*, 61) and Ike Froese (interview) refer to a K.T. Johnson who was the head of the Bow Clan which controlled the One and Two-Horn Societies. After K.T. Johnson converted, he burned the Bow Clan altar publicly. It is unclear if Fred Johnson and K.T. Johnson are the same person. James writes about dissent that arose between Hopi traditionalists and Hopi Christians because zealots "in fanatic zeal gathered up priceless ceremonial objects and burned them before the horrified eyes of fellow Hopi." *Pages from Hopi History*, 191. Ike Froese, who was a lay minister at New Oraibi from 1963-1967 and Native Ministries Executive Secretary from 1974 to 1979, approved of the altar burning. He said that it was Johnson's prerogative to declare his stand publicly. Froese commented: "K.T. Johnson did not want tourists/buzzards to come for the dead meat." Ike Froese, interview with Alvina Block, 22 March 2002. The Soyal, Snake and Antelope ceremonies all had altars. According to Hopi oral tradition, the Bow Clan was known as evil. It ruled in the third world and because it was wicked the third world was destroyed. Some members made it to the fourth world, multiplied, and settled in the Hopi mesas. The Two Horn society belonged to the Bow Clan. Two Horn rituals were needed to "complete the ceremonial pattern." One horn had limited knowledge. Two Horn had full knowledge. The One Horn and Two Horn societies were very important in the annual cycle. Waters, 108. See also Talayesva, 344.

Angeles, a non-Mennonite school.[648] These examples of Native leadership in Arizona sound impressive, but Johnson left the Mennonites in 1947 to begin his own independent church at Oraibi, a blow to the Mennonite church. Schirmer moved from Arizona to Montana in 1950 to work at the Birney mission station.. Thereafter, the Hopi Mennonite churches were again led by Mennonite missionaries.[649]

General Conference Mission Problems: 1930-1950

In Oklahoma, changes in methods were forced upon missionaries when their budgets were cut during the Depression years of the 1930s. Since there was less funding for Native mission stations from 1929 on, the number of Mennonite workers after that year was reduced from eight to six. Many Arapaho and Cheyenne had scattered and moved away from the vicinity of the mission stations because of the allotment system. Because missionaries now had cars, they could serve more than one church but they often lacked funds to buy gas. The Cheyenne and Arapaho had difficulties getting to distant churches so they became apathetic about church attendance and Christianity.[650] Missionaries in Montana also felt the effects of the Depression. Bertha Petter intimated in her report to the mission board that in hard

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1941): 90. Daniel Schirmer had been a motherless Hopi baby adopted and brought up by Mary Schirmer, one of the Mennonite missionaries at Arizona, in 1908. See *Minutes and Reports* (1935): 80. See also Barrett 44, 47. Hotevilla was one of the villages founded by the "hostiles" when they were driven out of Oraibi in 1906.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1947): 128 and (1953): 42. It seems strange that a Hopi Christian went to minister to the Cheyenne. There must have been language and other cultural problems to overcome.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 66-67. The Cheyenne and Arapaho were scattered as a result of the 1887 Dawes Act by which they were to live on small allotments of land instead of together on the reservations.

economic times, overseas missions received more finances and interest from the constituency with little remaining for North American missions.[651]

Continuity and resurgence of traditional rites were problems for General Conference missionaries and their boards. Mennonite missionaries lamented that the Cheyenne still participated in the Sun Dance in 1933. A battle raged between Cheyenne Christians and non-Christians. Mennonite missionaries and Cheyenne Christians sent a complaint to Washington stating that prostitution was a part of the Sun Dance ritual.[652] In response, non-Christian Cheyenne sent their own petition to Washington requesting that the missionaries be removed. Polarization between Christians and non-Christians resulted, since Cheyenne policemen who enforced order were church members. Christians were called missionary friends while non-Christians were called enemies. Such polarizations broke up Cheyenne family units.[653]

Change in government policy was another problem for General Conference missionaries and their boards. Milton Whiteman, a Northern Cheyenne minister, wrote:

> There was a period of time when the Sun Dance and other heathen worship was prohibited by the Indian Department in control at Washington, D.C. The Mennonite church had a large attendance at that time, and the experience was very encouraging to the Christians and Missionaries alike. But, alas, a severe change came about in the year 1933 when the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John C. Collier, came into office. It seems the bottom just fell out of everything and the devil took over. The churches suffered a great setback. A very sad state of affairs and conditions began. Liquor and

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 65.

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According to research done by Stanley Dyck, the wife of the man who had made a vow and sponsored the Sun Dance represented "Sacred Woman." She was offered as a sexual sacrifice to the leading priest who represented Maheo (Cheyenne God). The Sun Dance thus represented regeneration and renewal for humankind. Dyck, 152-154.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 62-64.

> immorality went on a rampage, and heathen worship of all kinds were resumed and have full swing.[654]

Prior to 1933, the government supported the missionaries in their battle against Native religious rituals such as the Sun Dance and the Peyote Way. Indeed, they outlawed the use of peyote and fined those who brought it from Mexico into the United States prior to 1908.[655] When John Collier became Commissioner of Indian Affairs, he initiated the Indian Reorganization Act which encouraged Native peoples to exercise religious freedom. Collier did not condone pressure by missionaries or government employees on Indians to accept any particular creed.[656] A Bureau of Indian Affairs circular issued in January 1934 entitled "Indian Religious Freedom and Indian Culture" stated: "No interference with Indian religious life or ceremonial expression will hereafter be tolerated."[657]

G.A. Linscheid, missionary at Canton, Oklahoma, reported to the Conference: "Unless the present policy is changed, these people will continue on the downward course induced by this policy."[658] Collier and the Indian Reorganization Act encouraged the Cheyenne and Arapaho in their peyote and traditional religions and in their resistance to the version of Christianity offered by Mennonite missionaries. Many Native Christians went back to their traditional religions or to a new brand of it, such as the Native American Church (peyote

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[654]In Barrett, 67.

[655]La Barre, 223.

[656]Barrett, 66-67. *Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1935): 71.

[657]Quoted in Stewart, 332.

[658]*Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1935): 71.

group). Some Native Christians who were in a financial position to support Mennonite mission churches joined the Native American Church instead.[659]

Peyote and the Sun Dance continued to have a strong hold on Cheyenne Christians in Montana. On the Sunday of Sun Dance, church attendance at Lame Deer was only 20. Highest attendance at Easter was 139.[660] In 1945 Petter reported to the Conference:

> The reaction among the heathen Indians against the "white man's religion" has grown in so far that the old heathen ceremonies paired with the mongrel peyote religion have lifted their heads, insisting that their ways of worshiping god is the best for the Indians. They shun all that God offers them in either Cheyenne or English, and even endeavor to have their will and power bear upon the Christian members.[661]

So traditional and syncretic rituals remained strong, with Mennonite missionaries still opposed to them, a huge problem for the churches in Montana.

Break-up of social structures was a problem in Arizona, sometimes because Mennonite culture was intertwined with the presentation of the Gospel. One of the services that Mennonite missionary wives offered was sewing classes for Hopi women.[662] Yet Hopi men were traditionally the sewers and weavers, a custom that was intricately involved with their religious rites in their underground kivas. Traditionally the Hopi kinship system was uniquely balanced, with women as the heads of their households and material resources and men

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1935): 71.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1941): 93.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1945): 13.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1935): 80.

responsible for religious rituals and practices.[663] Anthropologist Laura Thompson's opinion in 1950 was that Mennonite doctrine weakened the male role in the kinship groups. She believed that "by minimizing the role and functions of the Clan Chiefs and banning secret societies" the Mennonites "strengthened the role and functions of the Hopi women...upsetting thereby the organic balance of the Hopi social system...."[664] Women's control in Mennonite religious matters was illustrated in 1935 when a Hopi girl wanted to be baptized but was ordered to leave the church and go home. Reports stated that "her heathen parents...denied her this joy of being baptized" and then claimed that it was the mother, the girl's female friend's mother, and the grandmother who refused to allow the girl's baptism. In denying the girl the right to this Mennonite religious ritual only women were involved, contrary to Hopi custom where men decided who was ready to be initiated into one of their societies.[665]

Another problem in Arizona was the adverse effect of the Oraibi faction on Hopi Christians. John P. Suderman, missionary at Oraibi in 1933, wrote in his Conference report: "As you know, there has been quite a dissension in the Oraibi church (at the foot of the mesa) in the past. Last November a great reconciliation took place, however, the members are not all yet where they should be. The quarrel started 13 years ago."[666] While Mennonite

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[663] Siemens, 84. Trotta describes the Hopi as a matrilineal society in which the women owned the houses and seed corn and had authority over land use in consultation with male elders. Trotta, 93.

[664] Thompson, 140.

[665] *Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1935): 80-81.

[666] *Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America* (1933): 70. If Sudermann was referring to the well-documented rift at Oraibi between the "hostiles" and the "friendlies" (so named because the "friendlies were cooperative with

missionaries in Arizona lamented factions among the Hopi, they themselves had not been a good model for peace at this time. In the 1920s, John R. Duerksen and Jacob B. Frey both translated the Bible into the Hopi language, but instead of cooperating in this venture they disagreed. Frey used the Greek New Testament as a basis for his work, while Duerksen used the King James Version, each believing that his way was best. Duerksen accused Frey of universalism, the belief that all people would be saved in the end, a doctrine that Mennonites did not subscribe to. The disagreement between Duerksen and Frey reflected the fundamentalist/modernist debate raging in the wider constituency in the 1920s, with Duerksen showing fundamentalist characteristics while Frey was more open to modern teachings. Eventually the Board asked both men to resign. The tensions affected Hopi Christians adversely since they were deeply fond of Frey and could not understand why he had to leave.[667]

Perhaps because of the problems described, the Hopi were particularly resistant to the efforts of Mennonite missionaries to convert them. Churches were poorly attended. In 1957, there had been only 150 baptisms in the sixty years since Voth first began his mission to the Hopi.[668]

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government while the "hostiles" were not), he had his dates wrong. The famous split took place in Oraibi in 1906 "in a push-fight without weapons," when the "friendlies" pushed the "hostiles" across a line that they had drawn in the ground thus forcing them to leave. The "hostiles" then founded the villages of Hotevilla and Bacavi. Like the Mennonites, the Hopi were called a people of peace because they did not condone violence or war. Yet, like the Mennonites, they experienced dissensions and schisms. The well-documented 1906 Hopi rift was the conclusion of a fight that had been going on for years. Trotta argues that H.R. Voth was not the cause of the rift. It was brought on by cultural disintegration due to the challenges of western civilization, particularly the 1887 Dawes Act. As we have seen, Thompson blamed Mennonite teachings as one cause of the rift, 136-141.

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Barrett, 45-49. Especially affected by the resignation of Frey was the Hopi leader, Fred Johnson.

[668]Barrett, 54.

General Conference Mission Attitudes: Continuity over Change

In 1903, Henrietta Welty, Mennonite stenographer for H.R. Voth who was then returning to Arizona to do research work for the Field Columbian Museum in Chicago, wrote a letter that exemplified Mennonite attitudes of the time. Writing to her brother in Berne, Indiana she described the Hopi Katchina dances as "very sacred to the poor heathen." She continued:

> Mr. Frey has a real nice Sunday school; that is, for a heathen people....They [the Hopi] have so many ceremonies which are sacred to them and they [the Christian Hopi] want to take part at least in some. A missionary has very many trials and his patience is tried hard, if anybody's is. It takes a great many years to see any progress in the line of Christianity, especially if one cannot talk the language of the heathen. And I am sure that I shall admire any one working in the mission field more than I have done.[669]

The attitudes of General Conference missionaries and their boards had not changed significantly by 1933, thirty years later. In the conference minutes, the Cheyenne and Hopi were still referred to as "heathen people" who were largely uncivilized. Montana missionaries were called forces of light while the Cheyenne who had recently petitioned Washington to recall the missionaries were called forces of darkness. Mission work was seen as a battle between good and evil, with the missionaries contending for the truth.[670] American Mennonite missionaries were no closer to dialogue with Native peoples than they had been in their first twenty years of existence.

The 1933 conference report expressed superior and paternalistic attitudes. Referring to Cheyenne Christians in Oklahoma, H.J. Kliewer wrote: "They feel that we as alien

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[669]*The Mennonite* (17 March 1904): 6.

[670]

Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 61-62. The Cheyenne wanted to get rid of the missionaries because of their opposition to peyote and the Sun Dance.

missionaries with superior capacities, with hundreds of years of Christian training back of us, set standards before them which they, as a backward people under peculiar conditions, find impossible to attain, or to attain only in part."[671] Mennonite missionaries accused the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi of moral weakness, pride, and gossip. From their point of view, Native ceremonies were "heathen," even though they saw some similarities to Old Testament Jewish rituals.[672] They critiqued drinking, gambling, dancing, horse racing and Indian hand games as "worldly" and complained about dishonesty and loose moral standards among the Cheyenne and Hopi.[673]

General Conference reports referred to the Arapaho as "heathen" backward people who were dependent, indolent, helpless and unreliable.[674] The Hopi were called "nature worshipers and even devil worshipers."[675] The Northern Cheyenne were seen as "heathen and uncivilized," "forces of darkness" who threatened to drive out the missionaries who were "the light," darkness being associated with peyote and Catholics. Missionary Habegger called

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 68.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1933): 61-62. See also *Minutes and Reports* (1935): 75. Because their ceremonies had similarities to Old Testament rituals, the Hopi said they were already doing what the missionaries were preaching.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1938): 74.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1935): 68.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1938): 76.

unconverted Cheyenne "primitive people," who were ignorant and superstitious, drunken and lazy, and in the "darkness of heathen worship." [676]

The records show that attitudes of the General Conference missionaries, board, and constituency toward the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Hopi had not changed during their fifty years of activity among these peoples. Some methods in education and logistics were different, but only because conditions and government policies had changed, not because the Mennonites themselves desired change. John P. Suderman, missionary in Arizona, wrote in 1935: "Our present privilege of preaching rests chiefly on the work of the former missionaries," implying that past practices continued. Missionaries still did not allow for expressions of faith clothed in Native culture. By 1935, Hopi Mennonites had produced a songbook in their own language, but the tunes they used were not their own; they had learned them either at the government schools or from missionaries.[677] The Cheyenne also sang in their own language set to western hymn tunes, since Petter was opposed to Cheyenne words set to Cheyenne music.[678]

In the late1940s, General Conference missionaries in the United States were still imitating mainline denominations. For example, in Arizona, they pressed for a Mennonite

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1935): 75.

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1935): 79.

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Ethnomusicologist David Graber reported that as late as 1978 Native music in worship services was almost unheard of. Melanie Zuercher, "Graber helped native peoples to remember their songs," *Canadian Mennonite* (26 March 2001): 5.

school and hospital such as other denominations had. In 1950, a Mennonite school opened at Oraibi

In the 1940s, the attitudes of General Conference missionaries and boards remained basically the same as in the earlier period. Perhaps the word "heathen" was not used as much as earlier; but in 1947, when the Board asked missionaries to write about their views of present conditions and their vision for the future of their particular fields, Alfred Habegger at Busby, Montana saw no positive features in the Native American Church (the organized peyote groups). He called this church a "perpetual nuisance and a stumbling block" even though the Native American Church incorporated aspects of Christianity and was opposed to drinking and gambling. Habegger's vision for the future was bleak. He wrote:

> Before much progress can be expected, the Indians must want to live better, must be willing to work for better conditions, must have a vision of possibilities that are theirs, and must be made to desire a higher standard of living. To live according to Christian standards makes any people rise from ignorance and superstition to live a wholesome life based on Truth, and from filth and squalor to a life of cleanliness and godliness.[679]

Habegger very much connected "civilization" with Christianity and continued to think of the Cheyenne as ignorant, superstitious, and dirty.

Fifty years after the beginning of their ministry, General Conference missionaries remained opposed to any form of syncretism. The word "syncretism" was used seldom in reports, likely because it was beyond consideration. However, the missionary report from Arizona to the Conference stated:

> Where there is progress the Evil One is actively engaged in tearing down. He does this mainly through indifference, worldly attraction, misunderstandings, attempts at

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1947): 123, 127.

syncretism, and counterfeit--counterfeit in false teachings brought in from the outside.[680]

General Conference Missions after 1940

From 1938 to 1941, conference reports show that General Conference Native churches grew by 166 living members, a significant increase. After 1940, however, there was little growth in the Native churches. In 1960, a short report from the General Conference to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada noted that although the mission to the Indians was the oldest mission field, it showed little progress because Indians were reserved and it was hard to win their trust.[681] In 1967, there were eleven General Conference related churches in the United States and in 1980, there were twelve. Four of these twelve churches had no official memberships and two were not meeting on a regular basis. Although many Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Hopi had been baptized, only about half of the members actually attended church services. One Native church leader remarked: "Our churches are dying."[682]

When I began this study, I wondered what attitudes and methods MPM had learned from their counterpart in the United States. Given the problems and attitudes of the General Conference mission and the lack of significant change since its inception in 1880, MPM likely could not have benefitted from the experiences of the southern missionaries in the 1940s and

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Minutes and Reports of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America (1953): 45-46. The Oxford English Dictionary notes the word "syncretism" came into use in the 1600s. The older meaning was derogatory so older clergy thought of it in negative terms.

681 *CMCY* (1960): 98.

682

Barrett, 53-54. See also Malcolm Wenger, "Some Thoughts on Goals and Policies for the Indian Missions of the General Conference Mennonite Church," (1968) and Wenger "Goals for the Future" undated but likely in the 60s. Malcolm Wenger file in the possession of Alvina Block.

50s because changes in General Conference missions came later. It was another twenty years before new life came to American General Conference missions through the efforts of men such as Malcolm Wenger.

General Conference Missions and Change: 1960-2000

Malcolm Wenger was a catalyst for change in Native missions both in the United States and Canada. Wenger studied three years at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, two years at Bethel College in Newton, and two years at Wheaton College.[683] He took a summer course in linguistics in 1943. In 1954, after he had been among the Cheyenne for 10 years, he studied one year at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago. Wenger married Esther Boehr, a school teacher who had spent one year at Bethel College.[684] The General Conference Mission Board sent Malcolm and Esther Wenger to the Northern Cheyenne reservation (sometimes called the Tongue River Reservation) in Montana in 1944 and they stayed until 1966. In 1966, Wenger became the administrator for General Conference Indian missions. During Wenger's time in office, the Northern Cheyenne churches joined the Northern District Conference.[685] From 1978 to 1985 Wenger was the leader of the multi-ethnic Selkirk Church in Manitoba and for part of that time he was also the Native Ministries administrator.[686]

About their attitudes when they first came to the Northern Cheyenne and how they changed, Esther Wenger wrote in 2000:

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Bethel College is a Mennonite college, while the Los Angeles Bible Institute and Wheaton College are non-Mennonite schools.

[684]Resume in Malcolm Wenger file, copy in the possession of Alvina Block.

[685]The Northern District Conference was one section of the General Conference.

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Neil Unrau, "Excitement and challenges characterize Wenger's ministry," *Mennonite Reporter* (2 September 1985): 1.

> In 1944, I came to what I thought of as a heathen people to whom I would bring the Good News of Jesus love. Gradually I learned to respect their acknowledgment of a Creator and felt we were there to introduce them to Jesus the Creator's son....I began to understand that I was watching the unraveling of a society of people that had had pride and strength, a respect for the Creator. They practiced prayer, and had a strong sense of community that gave them security and equality....Our goal became to encourage leadership, to instill confidence, to start getting out of the way so decisions could be Cheyenne Christians' choices and vision.[687]

Malcolm Wenger soon realized that although the General Conference had been at Busby, Montana for 40 years there had been no progress toward making the church belong to the Northern Cheyenne Christians. Instead, they still felt like guests in the white missionary's church. Wenger began to think about and experiment with ways to change the Native church so that the Cheyenne would feel at home in their own church.[688]

In 1967, five of eleven General Conference-related churches had Native leaders, three of whom were ordained. Wenger observed that these "Indian leaders were responsible primarily to the missionary rather than to the church." Their salaries and status were lower than those of white missionaries Their own communities labeled them as "employees of the white man." Wenger wrote in 1966:

> We prolonged our control, thus depriving the young church of the struggles and joys and the possibility of failure that leads to maturity. We have yielded to the temptation of cultural pride. Why, one wonders, did we in our meeting places exchange the symbolic brotherhood of the Cheyenne way of meeting in a circle with all on one level for the straight rows of benches facing in one direction and dominated by a raised platform?[689]

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Esther Wenger, "How My Experiences with the Cheyenne People have Changed my Attitudes and Thinking." In Malcolm Wenger file.

688

Malcolm Wenger, "A New Look at Indian Missions." A paper presented at the 1963 MPM Conference. In Malcolm Wenger file.

689

Wenger in Barrett, 53. The Cheyenne churches in Montana had been under Petter's influence from 1916 to 1947. See also Esther and Malcolm Wenger, 18. Wenger was a member of the

Wenger trusted Cheyenne Christians in Montana to receive and count the offering, something they had not previously done. He encouraged the Cheyenne church council to make independent decisions. [690] Wenger pointed out that the Cheyenne and other Native tribes had gifts to offer that the Christian church badly needed such as generosity, a less rigid concept of time, living in harmony with nature, respect for elders, the importance of the community rather than the individual, a religion that permeated all of life, less emphasis on outer trappings such as church buildings and private possessions, and a greater capacity for forgiveness. Mennonites would be enriched when they learned to accept these gifts from Native peoples.[691] While Wenger was administrator of General Conference Indian missions (between 1966 and 1978), he encouraged David Graber, an ethnomusicologist, to tape the traditional music of Cheyenne elders, and then set Cheyenne words to indigenous tunes. Graber often noticed "a bunch of the old ones" singing these songs to themselves after services, with the rest of the congregation joining in. Graber published a collection of Cheyenne hymns in 1978.[692]

In 1969 Wenger helped to develop the Mennonite Indian Leader's Council (MILC) to take over the administration of missions to Native peoples. The MILC was to help Native Mennonite churches in the United States and the Hopi Mission School to set their own goals

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Commission of General Conference Home Ministries in 1973.

[690]Barrett, 72.

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Malcolm Wenger, "God Has Chosen some new brothers and sisters for us," *The Mennonite* (16 October 1973): 586-587.

[692]

Melanie Zuercher, "Graber helped native peoples to remember their songs," *Canadian Mennonite* (26 March 2001): 5.

and programs for their ministries. In 1999, nine Native churches belonged to the MILC which was run by a committee composed of five Native and three non-Native members.[693]

In 2000, Native congregations begun by General Conference missions were called "missioners" rather than "mission fields" reflecting not only their increasing self-governance but also changed attitudes of Mennonite who were still among them. Miles Reimer, employed by Mennonite Mission Network and also MILC, writes:

> While it is true that many Native congregations continue to have white pastoral leadership, they have clearly identified the desire to have Native pastors and are working toward processes that would call out and train leaders from among themselves. There is a wide spectrum of realities on this journey toward being missioners and not the mission field, but it is clear to me that they are on that journey.[694]

Reimer continues that it is difficult to say how many churches or members have derived from General Conference missions, but he lists three Northern Cheyenne congregations in Montana, two Hopi congregations in Arizona, and four Cheyenne congregations in Oklahoma.[695]

Manitoba Native Ministries: Congregations and Memberships (1980-2000)

Resistance to denominationalism and formal church membership was general among the Native churches begun by Mennonite Pioneer Missions/Native Ministries. It was difficult for northern Manitoba missionaries to begin Mennonite churches and to keep an accurate list of members.

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Directory of Mennonite Missions (1998-1999): 196. See also Melanie Zuercher, "Native assembly fruition of mission work," *Canadian Mennonite* (4 September 2000): 18. Menno Wiebe, Executive Secretary of Native Ministries, was also instrumental in developing the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council. Native Assemblies, beginning in 1993, grew out of MILC and included Manitoba Native Ministries churches.

[694]Miles Reimer, e-mail to Alvina Block, 10 December 2004.

[695]Miles Reimer, e-mail to Alvina Block, 10 December 2004.

An organized Mennonite church was never established at Matheson Island even though this was MPM's first and oldest station, begun in 1948. Martha Settee Bennett and Marian Settee were baptized in 1965, in Lake Winnipeg, after the Board allowed baptism by immersion. The congregation, consisting of four members (including the MPM workers, Emil and Evelyn Schmidt) and other non-members, chose the name "Matheson Island Christian Fellowship" with the word "Mennonite" not included. Raymond Settee was elected as "the lay leader or pastoral assistant for the congregation," with MPM missionary Emil Schmidt in charge.[696] However, Marian Settee moved to Winnipeg and Raymond Settee also left to take a government job in Selkirk where he became actively involved in the Aboriginal Redemption Centre Church. The chapel where the people met for services in 2004 was called the Matheson Island Community Chapel. The group never joined the Conference of Mennonites in Canada or any other denomination. Neill and Edith von Gunten said, in 2004, that the group was growing.[697]

In 1988, Matheson Island people celebrated the fortieth anniversary and in 1998 the fiftieth anniversary of MPM/NM presence in their community. Many former missionaries and teachers came to these celebrations and their attendance was greatly appreciated by the local people. One guest who attended the fortieth anniversary reminisced about the past: "We came to bring Jesus but discovered that the people of this community could show us something about Jesus that we had not experienced." He observed that during the fortieth anniversary

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von Gunten, 320. I have found no record of Raymond Settee's baptism and church membership. He was active in the church and had leadership qualities.

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Neill and Edith von Gunten, interview with Alvina Block, 7 October 2004. See also von Gunten, 320.

celebration "there was an underlying recognition of the deep friendship and mutual acceptance that [had] come to characterize the relationship between the people of Matheson Island and MPM/NM personnel over the years."[698]

At Manigotagan, across the lake, the first MPM baptism took place when Jake Unrau baptized Hannes and Winnie Bell from the neighboring village of Bissett and his own daughter in 1960. The three newly baptized members and the missionaries Jake and Trudie Unrau formed the church which they called the Grace Mennonite Church.[699] The Manigotagan people, however, were not willing to give up the beliefs and rituals of the Roman Catholic and Anglican denominations with which they and their ancestors were formally connected. The vision of the Manigotagan people, as early as 1971, was a "single locally organized community church" without denominational affiliations. In 1971, the Mennonite chapel had no members.[700] In 2004, this church was called the Manigotagan Community Chapel, with the word "Mennonite" absent.[701]

Up the Berens River east of Lake Winnipeg, the Pauingassi Mennonite Church was organized when Henry Neufeld baptized Jacob Owen, Lucy Owen, and St. John Owen in February 1966. During Neufeld's time at Pauingassi this church continued to grow and was referred to as a "model mission station" in the MPM Board report to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.[702] Yet, in 1986 sixty Pauingassi individuals, mostly young people,

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[698]Darrel Heidebrecht in von Gunten, 333-334.

[699]Unrau, 78. The Bells were likely not Ojibwa.

[700]*CMCY* (1971): 49. See also *Bulletin* (28 May 1971): 27.

[701]I do not know when the name change happened.

[702]*CMCY* (1965): 56.

were immersed by an Apostolic group.[703] Some of those who were immersed were members of the Mennonite Church.[704] The small Mennonite Church split, and negative feelings arose between the new Apostolic group and the remaining Mennonite group. In the 1990s, David Owen (one of the original Mennonite leaders) and his wife were also immersed, although they did not leave the Mennonite Church. However, some members of the Mennonite Church could not accept Owen's rebaptism. In 2001, the two groups worshiped separately, with Allen Owen leading the Apostolic group and David Owen leading the Mennonite group. Through the encouragement of Henry and Elna Neufeld, the two groups had a united communion service together in

2001 under the leadership of David Owen[705] and they continued to have some joint activities from 2001 to 2004, but both groups were very small.[706]

North of Lake Winnipeg, in the Cree community of Cross Lake, the Elim Mennonite Church was established in 1960 when Otto Hamm baptized two individuals.[707] By December 1960 Henry Gerbrandt reported, after visiting Cross Lake, that there was one "steadfast convert who has remained faithful" although several people said they were Christians but had not

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Immersion baptism means to be totally immersed in water as opposed to sprinkling, the form of baptism used by the Bergthaler Mennonites and Native Ministries.

[704]Henry and Elna Neufeld, 26, 113.

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Elna Neufeld, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 4 January 2001. David Owen (Ociip) was the only leader remaining of the original four who were ordained in 1972. Jacob (Ens), St. John (Katoons), and Spoot Owen were no longer living.

[706]Henry Neufeld to Alvina Block, 29 July 2004, 27 September 2004.

707

Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly (June 1960): 13. The baptismal candidates are unnamed but one was likely Mabel McIvor.

joined the Mennonite church.[708] Most of Cross Lake's 1200 people had been baptized as Catholics and were quite resistant to the Mennonite church. Under the leadership of Jeremiah Ross, the church remained small but stable although Apostolic groups were active here too, pressuring Christians to be rebaptized.[709] After Ross retired in 1998 Herman McKey, a local Cree Christian, became the leader of the Cross Lake Mennonite Church.[710] This church was renamed the Living Word Church in 2005.[711]

The Ojibwa communities of Bloodvein, Pine Dock, and Hollow Water on the east side of Lake Winnipeg did not establish organized Mennonite churches. Native Ministries terminated its work at Bloodvein in 1992 and at Hollow Water in 2000. Neil and Edith von Gunten continued to visit Matheson Island, Pine Dock and Loon Straits (now a very small community) from their Riverton location where they had begun a church. Converts called themselves the Riverton Fellowship Circle, but they were not affiliated with Mennonite Church Canada.[712]

In the 1960s, many people of Metis, Indian, and Mennonite backgrounds moved to Selkirk from more northerly locations such as Matheson Island, Manigotagan, Loon Straits,

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[708]*Mennonite Pioneer Mission Quarterly* (December 1960): 6-7.

[709]
Otto Hamm, telephone interview with Alvina Block, 3 March 2004. Hamm said there were three different Apostolic groups from areas around Lake Winnipeg, each with a different form of baptism. In 2003, Cross Lake's population was 5,500.

[710]
See *World of Witness*, a prayer guide for Mennonite Church Canada Witness (2002-2003): 137.

[711]
Walter Franz to constituency members, September 2005. The Living Word Church joined Mennonite Church Manitoba in 2006.

[712]The Riverton Fellowship Circle joined Mennonite Church Manitoba in 2006.

and Pine Dock to look for employment opportunities. In 1967, MPM sent Jake Unrau to "become pastor of the new, yet unorganized, Mennonite fellowship in Selkirk."[713] The church was eventually called the Selkirk Christian Fellowship. In 1992, this group decided that they wanted to be independent of Native Ministries.[714]

MPM records do not show numbers of members of churches, as earlier General Conference minutes do. As time went by, MPM became less preoccupied with numbers of converts or organized membership as a Mennonite church. People came together for fellowship in ecumenical fashion. When Wenger was the leader of the multiethnic church at Selkirk, Manitoba from 1978 to 1985, he found that there was "strong resistance to denominationalism and to church membership–a marked contrast to the willingness of the Cheyenne to be identified as Mennonite." Esther Wenger felt that "this could be a reaction to a strongly ethnic Mennonite identity" in southern Manitoba, where the word "Mennonite" applied to an ethnic group and had cultural as well as religious connotations.[715] Esther Wenger may have had a point since it was difficult for someone with a different ethnic background to feel at home in Manitoba's Mennonite churches where cultural traits and family networks were very strong.

As they learned through difficult experiences and the resistance of the people, the MPM/NM Board and the missionaries had to give up their goal to begin a Mennonite church at each of the locations where they were involved. Their new goal was to listen for Native

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[713]Unrau, 87.

[714]*Bulletin* (1992): 21, 22. *Intotemak* (Spring 2000): 5.

[715]
Neil Unrau, "Excitement and challenges characterize Wenger's ministry," *Mennonite Reporter* (2 September 1985): 1.

voices. The communities were asking NM to be "a Christian witness in the community, provide pastoral services, and play a reconciling role with other denominations."[716] NM had problems meeting these new goals because of their low budget.

Problems

The constituency continued to be more interested in the Commission on Overseas Mission than in missions to the Indians in their own country. Consequently, members of southern Manitoba Mennonite churches gave more money for faraway missions than for home missions. In 1959, MPM's budget was under $50,000 but Canadian Mennonites had given over $220,000 for foreign missions.[717] In 1996, Native Ministries had a budget of $42,267.[718] Overseas missions had a budget of 2.4 million.[719]

Another major problem was that in its early years of operation, MPM did not sufficiently consult with local people but made unilateral decisions regarding their affairs. For example at Matheson Island, the original log church, built by Garf Monkman in 1953, was converted into a workshop in 1969 because of an MPM Board decision that missionaries could reach the people better in a work setting than a worship service. Thus both Pete and Anne Marie Warkentin (1966-1972) and John and Margaret Klassen (1972-1976) held services only upon request and focused on getting to know the people through practical, everyday work in the converted chapel, now a repair shop. Sunday school and services, as desired, were held in a frame building also used as a youth centre.

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[716]*Bulletin* (May 1983): 30.

[717]*CMCY* (1959): 200-206. MPM's balance in the bank was overdrawn on 30 April 1959.

[718]Financial statements of Canadian Mennonites in Canada, 20, Schedule 6.

[719]Program and Workbook: General Conference Mennonite Church, Special Sessions, July 1997.

Menno Wiebe, Executive Director of MPM from1965 to 1970 and again from 1972 to 1974, realized that the Board had made this decision without consulting those whom it affected. He tried to move from board control to dialogue with the local people. When he asked the Matheson Island people how they felt about their chapel being turned into a workshop, they were surprised that their opinions were desired. Gradually, Wiebe heard that it hurt the people "to see a church or house of prayer being such a dirty place, having an oily floor and having sparks flying inside."[720] In the fall of 1987, the cleaned up chapel was dedicated and has been in use ever since, but as a community church rather than an organized Mennonite Church.

At Loon Straits, the MPM Board and personnel in the late 1950s and early 1960s failed to allow for leadership and ways of worship that were already in place, thereby polarizing the local people into hurtful divisions. Had they listened to the local people and respected their ways, much pain could have been avoided. Most Loon Straits people moved out of the area in 1965 because 17 people died in drowning and plane accidents that year.[721]

A positive turning point occurred in MPM/NM in the late sixties and early seventies through the insights of people such as Menno Wiebe, Ernie Sawatzky, and Jacob Loewen who urged that MPM workers were not at their stations merely to teach but also to learn.[722] Another turning point came to Native Ministries in the late seventies and early eighties when a spirit of discouragement threatened the work. Lack of finances and personnel showed that constituency interest was declining. As many Native people moved from the reserves to spend more time in

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[720]von Gunten, 324.

[721]Anne Monkman, 35.

[722]See Chapter 7, pages 16 to 18.

Winnipeg and Selkirk,[723] Mennonites lost the "romanticism of the removed and distant," as Fred Unrau NM Board Chairman expressed it. When urban Mennonites came into closer contact with Native people, prejudice was still evident.

On the reserves, several forces competed to lessen Mennonite influence. Pentecostalism was becoming more and more popular. But a rise in indigenous activism and pride in traditional religions also challenged the churches. Additionally, many young people were not responding to NM or other missionaries or to their own Christian elders because of alcohol and drug abuse.[724]

Native Leadership

Ideally and in theory, Native Ministries encouraged indigenous leadership. In the late 1980s, the Board and Executive Director of Native Ministries strongly urged Native churches to choose their own leaders and to participate in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. In 1987, David Neufeld (Chairman of NM) and John and Vera Funk (Executive Secretaries) wrote:

> The history of Native Ministries has largely been seen as a ministry by ethnic Mennonites to the Native people of Canada. Today, however, there is a strong movement towards developing leadership in the Native church that will participate fully in this program....If our relationship with Native people is to mature, the church must welcome them onto our boards and committees, into our pulpits, into our schools...and onto Native Ministries staff.[725]

No longer were Native converts to be objects of mission–they were to be considered as colleagues. However, the report continued:.

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[723] Aboriginal people commonly move back and forth, from reserves to cities and from cities to reserves.

[724] *Bulletin* (30 May 1976): 24-25.

[725] *Bulletin*, (May 1987): 22-23.

> Native churches must be welcomed into the Mennonite family in such an undeniable way that there is no question about our being brothers and sisters. The tests of that integrity will be whether church vocations will be open to them. Without such solidarity our mission is a hollow fake.[726]

As a further step toward indigenization, attempts were made in the 1970s to place Native converts on the NM Board. However, they felt uncomfortable with the southern Manitoba Mennonite style of making decisions by majority vote rather than by coming to a consensus.[727]

MPM did better than had the American General Conference mission in initiating Native leadership in mission churches during their first thirty years of operation. But as Jeremiah Ross at Cross Lake and St. John Owen, Jacob Owen, David Owen,[728] and Spoot Owen at Pauingassi became older and died, few concrete steps were taken by any party to train younger people to take their places. Malcolm Wenger began a leadership training course in 1986 but for some reason it ended before the course was completed.[729] Henry Neufeld wonders if the congregational split and negative feelings between the Mennonite and Apostolic groups at Pauingassi had a role in discouraging young leaders from taking over. Neufeld also blames distractions such as televisions, videos and greater access to the outside world for the failure of young people to become leaders of the church.[730] At Cross Lake, Jeremiah Ross designated Sam Ross to be his successor. However Sam Ross was not ready when Jeremiah Ross retired in 1998. Herman McKay then became the interim pastor but he had health

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[726]*Bulletin*, (May 1987): 22-23.

[727]*Bulletin,* (May 1983): 30-31.

[728]
David Owen is still living in 2005, but he is on dialysis and for this reason he spends most of his time in a hotel in Winnipeg.

[729]*Bulletin* (22 May 1986): 28.

[730]Henry Neufeld to Alvina Block, 29 July 2004 and 27 September 2004.

problems. Sam and Lorna Ross took over in 2003, but in 2004 Sam did not feel that he should be the pastor so Lorna took initiative in leadership.[731]

As mentioned above, another factor was the rise of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada which, from 1950 to 2000, had established 33 Native churches in Canada, 12 of which were viable. Donovan Jacobs, a Christian Ojibwa, was hired by Native Ministries in 2002 to develop Native leadership training programs and to build relationships between Natives and Mennonites. He held a theology degree from Eastern Pentecostal Bible College in Peterborough, Ontario and had continued in graduate studies in Tyndale Seminary, Toronto. Jacobs said Pentecostals were more successful because they emphasized empowerment of the Spirit, in line with aboriginal traditional religion. They planted Bible campuses in the North where Natives who had potential for leadership received training. Although these Bible campuses were no longer operating, they had been important in the past. MPM/NM, in contrast, ran children's programs rather than theological and administrative training for future leaders and pastors. Thus Native peoples who connected with MPM got "the milk, not the meat of the Word," according to Jacobs.[732]

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Neill and Edith von Gunten, interview with Alvina Block, 7 October 2004. See also *World of Witness* (2002-2003), 137. The church in Cross Lake was called the Living Word Church in 2005 and was building a new chapel with southern Manitoba help.

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Donovan Jacobs, interview with Alvina Block, 3 August 2004. Jacobs worked for Mennonite Church Witness from 2002-2004 in constituency relations. He did not say where the northern Bible campuses were located or when they were in operation. Jacobs referred to Hebrews 5:13-14: "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." See also Donovan Jacobs, "Native Ministry Today," *Canadian Mennonite* (7 October 2002): 6-9. Henry Neufeld says programs for children are important because parents are drinking. Telephone conversation, 6 December 2005.

The records show that MPM/NM continued to put much time and energy into children's programs, such as camps and Daily Vacation Bible Schools. These programs were begun in the early 1950s and continue to the present. For example, in 2003 Mennonites from Winkler and Steinbach ran a children's camp at Matheson Island and DVBS at Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids, and Manigotagan[733] and in 2004, Altona young people conducted DVBS at Cross Lake. Neill von Gunten pointed out that Daily Vacation Bible School did not really add members to the church or prepare future leaders.[734] Suitable opportunities for higher education for potential Native leaders were and are not available. Financial constraints may have dictated some of these methods since it was likely cheaper to run programs for children with volunteer help from the south than to build seminaries to educate future Native leaders.

Norman Meade, born at Manigotagan, planned to become the resident pastor at Manigotagan in the fall of 2004.[735] Meade and his wife Thelma, Chief George Barker's daughter, formerly of Hollow Water, said that MPM/NM thought of the Manigotagan church as their denominational church but in reality it was a community church. When Meade officiated at communion, he would think of it as the Lord's table, not as a Mennonite table. He also preferred infant baptism to the Mennonite practice of adult baptism upon confession of faith since he grew up in a Catholic home and was baptized as an infant himself. However, he expressed willingness to baptize according to each candidate's preference. Meade said that denominational walls are breaking down. People are looking for Jesus, not for denominational

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[733]*MPMQ* (January 1953): 6. *Intotemak* (summer 2003): 5-6.

[734]Neill von Gunten, interview by Alvina Block, 7 October 2004.

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Meade recently retired from a government job in Winnipeg. When I spoke to Meade in November 2004, he had taken another short term job in Winnipeg but he said he hoped to move to Manigotagan in the spring of 2005.

affiliation.[736] The Meades' outlook suggests that the Christians around the Narrows of Lake Winnipeg tend to be interdenominational or nondenominational in their thinking.

In 1993 Walter Franz (Executive Secretary of NM since 1990) hoped that in the future there would be equal representation on the NM Board of Native and Mennonite constituency members. Franz's dream materialized in 1997 when the NM Committee was made up of five Native and five non-Native members.[737] However, the rhetoric of the equal representation of a Native voice in their local church affairs was deceptive. When Mennonite Church Canada[738] cut financial aid to the NM program in 2002, Native people were not consulted in any way, although they were directly affected.

Attitudes

How have attitudes changed since Jake Unrau came to Matheson Island in 1948? Unrau, in the late 1940s and 1950s, appeared kind and gentle sometimes but harsh at other times. At Rabbit Point (not far from Matheson Island), he called the people heathen on one occasion. They reprimanded him, put him into his boat, and sent him back to his Matheson Island home.[739]

By the late 1960s, Unrau's methods and attitudes had changed. When he was in Selkirk from 1967 to 1972, Unrau earned money by delivering groceries for a Tomboy store

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[736]Norman and Thelma Meade, interview with Alvina Block, 29 October 2003.

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Bulletin (1993): 29. *Bulletin* (1997): 13. After the Conference reorganized, the Native Ministries Board was called the Native Ministries Committee, a sub-committee of the Ministries Commission.

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Mennonite Church Canada is the name for Conference of Mennonites in Canada since restructuring in 1999.

[739]Neill and Edith von Gunten, interview with Alvina Block, 7 October 2004.

rather than depending completely on mission funds for financial support. The group who attended the Selkirk Christian Fellowship resolved to be self supporting. Unrau was more ecumenical in his outlook than he had previously been, regularly attending ministerial meetings with pastors of the Lutheran, United and Anglican churches. The people who attended the Selkirk Christian Fellowship had more decision-making power than was the case at mission stations in former years. Unrau wrote in 1972: "I have confidence in the Native people's ability to find their own solutions,"[740] a change from his earlier rigid stance at Matheson Island.

Certainly goals had changed. The vision of a group of believers, baptized as adults by the accepted Bergthaler form of sprinkling and forming an independent Mennonite church with conference affiliations, was no longer seen as likely. The accepted reality by the 1970s was a group of non-denominational believers gathering for worship and fellowship, with a strong voice in their own affairs. They were still led by NM workers but from the background.

In 1982, a small gathering of NM workers reviewed the past and shared what they thought were the most important contributions they had made over the years. Significantly, they did not highlight what they had done. They were intent on being more aware of cross cultural perceptions and points of view. According to Esther Wenger's article in the *Mennonite Reporter*, acquaintance with peoples of other cultures had changed the missionaries' attitudes; native awareness in the constituency had increased; friendship and trust had developed; missions had become more reciprocal.[741]

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Unrau to Darrel and Gladys Heidebrecht, in *Living in the Way*, 92. The Heidebrechts were members of Selkirk Christian Fellowship.

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Esther Wenger, "Native ministries workers celebrate ties with native people," *Mennonite Reporter* (17 May 1982): 9. Malcolm Wenger was Executive Secretary of NM in 1982.

In 1994 Henry Gerbrandt, MPM secretary from1950 to1966, noted changes in board policy that had come about. He admitted that in the past Christian missions had been "unkind to Native spirituality and culture." They had "cooperated too uncritically with government agencies in trying to conquer the Native people and rid them of their `savage habits.'" He continued:

> That approach has been wrong and needs to be faced, confessed, and corrected. At the same time, the Gospel ceases to be the saving Gospel when the unique historical Christ is removed from its centre. We cannot let that happen....During the early days of MPM we did not even begin to understand what is now called Native spirituality. And the brief encounters we had with it only fortified our misconception that it was demon-influenced.[742]

Contrasts/Comparisons of the General Conference Mission and MPM/NM

In summary, MPM/NM had far fewer converts after fifty years than the American General Conference missions. Cross Lake and Pauingassi were led by native leaders much earlier than the General Conference Native churches; however, northern Manitoba Native leaders were aging and dying without being replaced.

A conservative constituency was a hindrance to a flexible approach toward Native missions in Manitoba. To illustrate, when the members of the 1979 Study Commission asked the Rev. Stan McKay, a United Church Cree minister, for a Native Ministries evaluation, he drew the following conclusions:

> 1. The workers are often torn and hurting in the cross-cultural experience because there is no one at home who is willing to hear the "new" truth they have encountered.
> 2. The church is unable to be a supportive constituency because the conservatism holds to a secure theology (My "God" in a box)
> 3. The Native Ministries Board, because it is so related to the congregational politics, cannot be supportive to the wounded workers nor can they be liberators of a captive people at home.

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[742]Gerbrandt's farewell speech, in Gerbrandt, *Hinjawaeajis*, 211.

> 4. The work, as I perceive it, has not been done at the constituency level and until it is there can be no peace; only pain on the cross-cultural front and a sense of security in the [home] churches.[743]

Did the constituency become more understanding of cross cultural issues in the United States during the same decades? In 1973, Malcolm Wenger, then on the General Conference mission staff in Newton, Kansas, wrote an article in *The Mennonite* called "God has chosen some new brothers and sisters for us." Among other insights, Wenger observed:

> ...for the Mennonites of Canada and the United States it may be that God's purpose for our growth and maturity may be enhanced especially by the North American Indian brothers and sisters that he has chosen for us and the gifts and insights that he has given to them. I wonder if we are making the most of these opportunities for growth that God is making available to the Mennonite church?[744]

Wenger's wistful statement, made in the 1970s, indicates that the American Mennonite constituency was not understanding of their missionaries' more flexible attitudes on cross-cultural issues and was no more ready to invite them into their churches and conferences than was the Canadian constituency.

Mennonites in the United States were ahead of Manitoba Mennonites in language change, salaried pastors, involvement in missions, and organizations in general, but their constituencies did not seem to make progress in their attitudes toward aboriginal peoples. American General Conference Mennonite missions, though they began much earlier than their

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Stan McKay, "Native Ministries Evaluation," June 1979. Isaac Froese file in possession of Alvina Block. McKay was moderator of the United Church in 1992. He has also been the director of the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resouce Centre in Winnipeg, which trains Native church leaders and offers cross-cultural education for non-natives. By "a sense of security in the churches" McKay likely meant that southern Manitoba churches were satisfied that they were doing their part to evangelize Native peoples in their province.

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Malcolm Wenger, "God has chosen some new brothers and sisters for us," *The Mennonite* (16 October 1973): 586.

Manitoba counterparts, did not make progress in methods and attitudes until the 1960s and 1970s, when MPM/NM was also struggling to become more understanding of cross cultural issues and aboriginal peoples.

Chapter Nine

Conference Reorganization and its Consequences (1999-2004)

In 1999, the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC), the Mennonite Church (MC), and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) held a binational convention in St. Louis, Missouri. This convention brought to fruition much previous planning for reorganization. The reorganization united the three conferences, with "Mennonite Church" as the new name given to the "united identity." The boards of the conferences decided, however, to have "separate and cooperating conferences," in Canada (Mennonite Church Canada) and in the United States (Mennonite Church USA).[745] These two conferences planned to meet separately every year and together every four years.[746] The actual process of the complete reorganization of all conference programs was officially completed on 1 February 2002.

As a result of the merger, new programs were planned over the next two years. On 1 February 2002, the Commission on Overseas Mission (GC), the Commission on Home Ministries (GC), and the Mennonite Board of Missions (MC) united to become Mennonite Church Canada Witness. Mennonite Church Canada Witness oversaw all Mennonite Church Canada mission programs, including Native Ministry.[747] The Mennonite Church USA mission programs were called Mennonite Mission Network.[748] Of the effects of restructuring on missions Adolf Ens, Mennonite historian, wrote:

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[745] Ron Rempel, "Our St. Louis Journey," *Canadian Mennonite* (5 July 1999): 2. The GC and MC were from both Canada and the United States while CMC is Canadian.

[746] Actually, they did not meet again as a joint convention before 2005, six years since 1999.

[747] Native Ministries was renamed Native Ministry in 2002.

[748] See *CHM/COM/MBM Directory of Mennonite Missions 2000-2001*, 2.

> The greatest changes were anticipated in the Ministries Commission. It would have to venture into the complex field of colonial overseas mission and inherit many threads of a network of international relations. It would have to find ways of balancing its investment of financial and human resources in Native Ministries with these new international ministries.[749]

Although the new organizations divided into Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA, representatives of Mennonite Native groups from the United States and Canada were ready to integrate immediately across the 49th parallel since they had never liked the separation line between American and Canadian communities.[750] The relationships between Mennonite Church Canada Witness and Mennonite Mission Network have remained strong in the twenty-first century, as General Conference missions and MPM/NM had been connected in the past. Beginning in the 1990s, Native Christians from northern Manitoba communities had gone annually to the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council in Arizona, Montana, or Oklahoma (hosted by General Conference Native churches) to meet and discuss with American Native Christians issues such as "leadership training, alcohol abuse, family life, and need for broader fellowship."[751]

Native converts connected to Mennonite missions were relating across the 49th parallel, but they were also bridging the Mennonite Church and the General Conferences. Even before reorganization of the conferences, Native converts with connection to the General Conference, the Mennonite Church, and Native Ministries were already relating in a very meaningful way.

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[749]Adolf Ens, 217-218.

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Tom Price, "Mission transformation underway," *Canadian Mennonite* (26 April 1999): 14. See also "Native groups integrating," press release of *Canadian Mennonite* (26 April 1999): 14.

[751]

Bulletin (1990): 21; (1991): 26. Mennonite Indian Leaders Council sometimes meets in Canada now.

United Native Ministries (MC), the Mennonite Leaders Council (GC), and Native Ministries in Canada moved towards closer cooperation in 1991. The mission organizations of United States and Canada met twice a year with staff and Native representatives. A Native Assembly was held every two years which was open for anyone from the communities to attend.[752]

In November, 2003, I attended a meeting at the Winnipeg Home Street Mennonite Church where representatives of the United Native Ministries, Mennonite Indian Leaders Council, and Native Ministry met. The purpose of the meeting was to plan for Native Assembly 2004 and to discuss how Native churches could structure themselves and support each other. Walter and Hilda Franz had invited me for supper so that I could connect with some of the Native leaders. That evening, I met Cheramie Risingsun, Native pastor from Louisiana, Donovan Jacobs, Ojibwa Constituency Education facilitator for Mennonite Church Canada Native Ministry; Lawrence Hart, Cheyenne pastor from Oklahoma; Priscilla Wero, Navajo leader in the New Mexico Mennonite Church; Leonard Little Wolf, Director of Pre-School and Head Start for the Northern Cheyenne; Willis Busenitz, non-Native pastor in Montana; and Marvin Yoyokie, Hopi leader. Although I was not allowed to attend their meetings because I was not a delegate, it was good to connect people whom I had read about with actual faces and personalities.[753]

In July, 2004, I attended the biennial Native Assembly held in Riverton, Manitoba, where I met Native Christians from the United States and Canada. There was a wonderful

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[752]Walter Franz, interview with Alvina Block, 21 May 2002.

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For example, Cheramie Risingsun's interesting ministry style was described by Leona Dueck with Eric Olfert, "Being church, native style," *Canadian Mennonite* (8 September 2003): 4. The Louisiana church is "deliberately contextualized and enculturated" which means "to honor Christ in native tribal ways, not only in worship but in passages of life such as healing rituals, weddings, and funerals."

diversity of gifts and talents at the Assembly, as the Native Christians came from many different tribes such as Cheyenne, Hopi, Lakota Sioux, Navajo, Creek, Choctaw, Cree, Ojibwa, and mixed ancestry. All participated in their own unique ways as they led in worship and singing. I met Cheyenne Christians from Oklahoma and Montana, and Hopi Christians from Arizona. Most notable was one of the speakers, Lawrence Hart, Southern Cheyenne peace chief and pastor of the Mennonite Church in Clinton, Oklahoma, one of the four small present-day Mennonite churches in Oklahoma. He was educated at the Mennonite Seminary at Elkhart, Indiana, and had traveled widely to such places as Zurich, the cradle of the Anabaptist movement.

Montana was represented by Willis Businitz, the long-time non-Native pastor of the Busby Church, David Graber, a musicologist who was living on the Crow reservation, and several women. A group of eight from the Cheyenne churches sang several Jesus-centred songs in Cheyenne melody and words. One of the songs had been composed at night by students at Carlisle, who were forbidden to speak the Cheyenne language. The Cheyenne musicians sang in unison, without accompaniment; indeed it would have been impossible for any non-Native to accompany them on the piano since their tonal system is so different from that of European music. Only drums and rattles would have been suitable, and they had not brought these instruments. There were no definite tones and semitones, and the music began high and went down to a low pitch at the end. Graber has been influential in bringing this music into the Native churches.

Four Hopi Christians were at the Assembly, three women and Marvin Yoyokie the accountant for the Arizona Mennonite School, in spite of the long distance they had to travel. They told me that there were several small Hopi Mennonite churches in 2004. The women

were from the Bacavi Mennonite Church in Arizona; the youngest woman held a Master's Degree in Social Work. These four Hopi people sang "How Great Thou Art" with Hopi words to European music, in unison and without accompaniment. Yoyokie led the evening healing service in prayer and meditation. The Native Christians from Louisianna, Alabama, Mississippi, and South Dakota came from the former Mennonite Church who joined with the General Conference in 1999.

Christians from Manigotagan provided a gospel jamboree by the Northern Gospel Lights singers. Matheson Island people hosted an Assembly youth camp and provided a delicious pot-luck supper to those Assembly attenders who went on a tour of their Island. The original log chapel and residence built by Jake Unrau, first MPM missionary, were still in use. These buildings looked very modest by today's standards. To my knowledge, there were no representatives at the Assembly from Loon Straits (only two families have been living there), Pauingassi, or Cross Lake.

My predominant impression of the occasion was the servant ministry of non-Natives such as Neill and Edith von Gunten and Walter and Hilda Franz. They were not seen on the platform much; they were busy coordinating, supplying information, organizing tours and providing day care for children. Their back seat roles enabled Native Christians to take prominent positions on the platform. The few Mennonite constituency members who attended the Assembly concluded that the contributions of General Conference missions and Mennonite Pioneer Mission/Native Ministries over the years could not be measured in numbers of Christians or churches but rather in the diverse expressions of faith in Jesus Christ shared by Native Christians through the years.

Donovan Jacobs, in his presentation at the 2004 Native Assembly, maintained that there was still racism in the churches. He said Mennonites wanted Native Christians to fit into the Mennonite framework, to be like them, to think like them. Honest and open discussion and mutuality were needed for progress to take place. Mennonites needed to trust Native Christians with resources, time and power to make their own decisions.[754]

When I interviewed Jacobs in August 2004, he had been in his position for two years but he was leaving it. He said that during his first year many constituency members had been interested in his ideas about bringing cultures together, but only those people who were already sympathetic with Native issues were attending the meetings he held. During his second year he tried to contact apathetic and unsympathetic Mennonite constituency members, but the segment of the church that had not responded during the first year did not attend during the second year either. Jacobs concluded that bigotry was still alive in Mennonite churches. He thought that society at large did not like talking about Native land and fishing rights or independent government, and those attitudes had crept into the Mennonite churches as well; members were unresponsive to and uncaring for Native peoples.

Jacobs felt that Mennonite Church Canada Witness was more interested in international ministries because overseas mission was more successful. Trained missionaries had gone abroad while workers without pastoral education or background had remained in Canada and had been responsible for training Native leaders. But how could Mennonite missionaries train pastors when they were not seminary-trained themselves, asked Jacobs? Missionaries without cross-cultural training were paternalistic, with a tendency to protect

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Donovan Jacobs and Walter Franz, "A Vision for Native Ministry, Mennonite Church Canada," workshop at Native Assembly 2004, 28 July 2004.

instead of empower Native peoples. From the beginning there was a colonial mind set and a certainty that outside of the Mennonite Church nothing contributed to God's intent. Such attitudes still lingered in the constituency, according to Jacobs.[755]

Constituency attitudes filtered down to monetary matters. The main purpose for conference integration and reorganization in 1999, according to the steering committees, was to become better equipped for missions.[756] Yet financial constraints and cutbacks in Mennonite Church Canada seriously curtailed Native Ministries programs in 2003. The only paid positions left in 2004 were Walter Franz (half time) and Donovan Jacobs (full time). However when Jacobs resigned in 2004, his position for constituency education ended. Neill and Edith von Gunten were being supported by their home church in Berne, Indiana, but only for a year. Henry Neufeld lamented the financial cutbacks:

> I really do not know where this leaves us except in the desert. It is really good to see what is taking place in Cuba for example and Colombia etc., but the fact that we are living on the back doorstep of our Native Nation and then to eliminate them in this way is hard to grasp.[757]

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Donovan Jacobs, interview with Alvina Block, 3 August 2004. Henry Neufeld and Ernie Sawatzky did have pastoral education and they were successful in developing Native leadership. There has, however, been a dearth of Native leadership in recent years, at least at Pauingassi.

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See "Introducing Mennonite Church Canada," Supplement to *Canadian Mennonite*, (25 October 1999): B1-B2.

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Henry Neufeld to Alvina Block, 27 September 2004. Robert J. (Jack) Suderman became the Executive Secretary of the Ministries Commission of Mennonite Church Canada in 1999, a position Walter Franz had held until then. Franz became Program Director of Native Ministries. Suderman, overseeing the whole mission program of Mennonite Church Canada, had more interest in Mennonites in Cuba and in South America than in Native missions. See Latin American perspective on Spirituality and mission" by John Driver in *Canadian Mennonite* (16 August 1999): 7.

Commenting on financial cutbacks, former MPM missionary Jake Neufeld suggested that Mennonites should remember that they were taught by itinerant ministers for many years before churches were established. They should remember how they had been nurtured by itinerant ministries and realize that aboriginal peoples needed the same kind of nurture. The constituency should continue to provide resources for itinerant ministers, such as Henry Neufeld or a successor, to visit converts at Native Ministry locations for many more years.[758]

Walter Franz, largely responsible for what was left of Native programs in 2002, said that Native Christians' trust in Mennonite Church Witness eroded when cutbacks were made without consulting them. However, their hope for the future was that Native Ministry would coordinate partnership circles with churches. Native Christians who had been connected with MPM/NM in the past were still asking Manitoba Mennonite churches to help them with leadership training and children's ministries. Relationships with some southern Manitoba churches had grown strong over the years because they had returned annually to run Daily Vacation Bible School and camp programs at northern churches.[759]

In March 2004, a Native Ministry consultation was held in Winnipeg to discuss the idea of partnership circles, the goal being that southern Manitoba congregations would work together with Native communities in training leaders, providing resources, and building communities. These partnerships would be mutual; each would learn from the other. Norman

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[758]Jake Neufeld, interview with Alvina Block, 7 June 2004.

[759]Walter Franz and Donovan Jacobs "A Vision for Native Ministry, Mennonite Church Canada," 28 July 2004.

Meade, speaking for Manigotagan people, promised to bring "what they received over the years, including love and wisdom, as well as their pain."[760]

On 30 November and 1 December 2004, Native Ministry partnership meetings took place at the Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. Present were representatives from three Mennonite churches–Sargent, Bethel (Winnipeg), and Berne (Indiana), home church of Neill von Gunten's parents and Native Ministry staff and people from the northern ministry groups, as mission stations were now called. Out of twenty-four people in attendance at the meetings, only six were Native–one from Cross Lake, one from Manigotagan, and four from Riverton. Henry Neufeld, who was there, told me that it was too expensive to fly a representative in from Pauingassi. Robert J. Suderman, head of Mennonite Witness, attended only briefly on Wednesday. His absence seemed to confirm a lack of Conference interest in working together with Native peoples. The goal of these meetings was to talk about partnerships between Mennonite churches and ministry groups. The nature of these partnerships was to be determined. The question they struggled with was: "Were partnerships for moral and spiritual support only or were they also for financial support? Native converts and members of the constituency needed to come to agreement on this issue.

From 2002 to 2004, references to Native churches in conference minutes decreased. Mennonite Church Canada Witness minutes focused on concerns such as *Aussiedler*[761] and a new mission in Cuba. For the United States, the minutes of Mennonite Mission Network from 2002 to 2004 did not refer to aboriginal churches, other than mentioning that Cheramie

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Leona Dueck Penner, "Partnership circles hold promise for Native Ministry," *Canadian Mennonite* (17 May 2004): 18-19.

[761]Mennonites who recently came from Russia to Germany.

Risingsun was absent from a picture of the Board of Directors of Mennonite Mission Network (so obviously he was on that Board). Focus in both Canada and the United States was on being a "missional" church, the new buzz word signifying that local congregations were to partner with mission churches all over the world and that the mission field was next door, wherever they lived. Budgets did not allow for finances to support aboriginal missions. In the United States, the problem of finances was not as acute as in Canada because some leaders of Native Mennonite churches had other means of support. [762]

In sum, although General Conference missions in the United States began much earlier than MPM/NM, changes in attitudes and methods did not come earlier in the south. The attitudes of General Conference and MPM/NM missionaries and staff towards Native peoples changed during the same time period, not after a certain length of operation. When MPM began in 1948, missionaries and Board could not learn any valuable lessons in attitudes toward Native peoples from their southern counterparts, not only because they thought their southern counterparts were more liberal, but also because General Conference attitudes toward aboriginals had not changed significantly since their beginning in 1880. In the 1960s, however, leaders in both organizations thought seriously about indigenous leadership and cross cultural issues. In the 1970s, they wrestled with problems of learning more about Native spirituality and encouraging Native leadership but were opposed to any form of syncretism.

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One difference between northern Manitoba missions and Mennonite missions in the United States in 2004 is that the pastors are what Neill von Gunten called tentmaker pastors who supported themselves. Willis Businitz, non-Native pastor at Busby, Montana, was a rancher and his wife worked in the local post office. The von Guntens said that in northern Manitoba communities, fishing was the only job available to the pastor/missionary. In addition, MPM/Native Ministries did not encourage the wives of missionaries to work, so it was more difficult to be self-supporting. Neill and Edith von Gunten, interview with Alvina Block, 7 October 2004.

With regard to denominationalism, attitudes have changed greatly in the last five decades. For example, Walter Franz stated to a *Canadian Mennonite* reporter:

> We have congregations who don't see themselves only as Mennonites...Manigotagan, for example, includes Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and Pentecostal, as well as Mennonites. For us to push the Mennonite label would lead to some confusion. Denominationalism has been divisive in the past so we need to be careful.[763]

Such an interdenominational attitude was very different from the 1940s and 50s when Mennonite church planting was one of the primary goals of MPM missionaries and Board members. In the United States, however, loyalties to the name "Mennonite" seemed to be stronger among churches relating to Mennonite Mission Network (formerly General Conference missions). In 2000, at least ten Native American churches included "Mennonite" in the official name of their congregation.[764]

Board members such as Ike Froese and Walter Franz (for Canada) and Malcolm Wenger (for the United States) had much to do with changes in attitudes. Anthropologists Menno Wiebe, Ernie Sawatzky, and Jacob Loewen helped to shape thinking about other cultures in more relativistic terms. Both in Canada and in the United States, the attitudes of Mennonite missionaries and many Board members were much more relational and dialogical in 2004 than they were before 1960.

The changes, however, took place among those missionaries and Board members who had contact with Native Christians. Many constituency members could not understand the new interest in cross-cultural relationships. In the 1980s, as Native churches failed to grow, many

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Leona Dueck Penner, "Native Ministry encompasses broad vision," *Canadian Mennonite* (7 October 2002): 10.

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See *CHM/COM/MBM Directory of Missions 2000-2001*, 190. These churches were members of the Indian Leaders Council.

members of the constituency became disillusioned with missions to Native peoples. In 2004, the respective conferences virtually discontinued financial support for missions to aboriginals. It remained for individuals and churches to pick up where conferences had given up, to partner with Native groups, and understand their perspectives, and to show interest in Native converts who had no particular denominational affiliation with any particular church but who followed Jesus. One area where attitudes remained largely unchanged was on the issue of syncretism. Donovan Jacobs defined syncretism as a "mixture of two theological perspectives." He preferred to talk about contextualization, a redeeming form of indigenization. Although Jacobs agreed that syncretism is a fact among Native peoples, he did not think it should be present within the church because it takes beliefs "outside the parameters of Christianity."[765] At the Native Assembly 2002 held in Louisiana, Jacobs found that Native speakers "reflected both sides of the sensitive debate about contextualization. One side opposed using native cultural forms to express the gospel, and the other half were for it."[766]

At the Native Assembly 2004, the Hopi women participants told me that their community was divided on the issue of syncretism. Older Hopi were disturbed when the drum was played in church or when women wore slacks, they said. These matters seem to me to reflect the influence of conservative Mennonite teaching, rather than to indicate rejection of syncretism. Nonetheless, David Graber, musicologist and workshop speaker, addressed syncretism directly. His view was that Mennonite missionaries should not reprove their

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Donovan Jacobs, interview with Alvina Block, 3 August 2004. Louis Bird, a Cree elder who is a practising Catholic, does not like syncretism either. He calls it "blending" and says it is dangerous. See for example, Bird, *Telling Our Stories: Omushkego Legends & Histories from Hudson Bay*, eds. Jennifer S.H. Brown, Paul W. DePasquale, and Mark F. Ruml (Peterborough: Broadview Press), 51-54, 236-237.

[766]*Canadian Mennonite* (7 October 2002): 7.

converts if they continued to participate in ceremonies. Rituals such as peyote, the Sun Dance, and the pipe ceremony should carry on, without judgement by the church, unless the participants themselves became convinced that they should leave them. Graber referred to a Hopi comment that rituals should be taken to the cross for God to do his will with them. Each person needed to be respected. There could be a rich diversity in worship, so one person's answer may not serve for another person. Jesus could transform what was brought to him, so that a Katchina Dance could be a form of worship if it was done for God.[767] Many constituency members, however, were still threatened by the idea of cross-cultural equality and certainly by any variation or hint of syncretism.

Early Christianity was syncretistic since it incorporated elements of paganism such as gnosticism, a belief that there was a distinct separation between the physical and the spiritual worlds. The physical world was made by an ignorant creator while the spiritual world was made by a transcendent God. Thus some early Christians believed that the physical world was evil. Richard Twiss, who grew up on the Rosebud reservation of the Sioux/Lakota tribe, is a well-known Christian speaker at conferences where many indigenous people from all over the world attend. Twiss believes that the influences of gnosticism are still evident in Christianity because Anglo Christians make sharp distinctions between the physical world and the spiritual whereas Native peoples integrate the two worlds. Twiss argues that "the Native's integrated view of life and spirituality is actually much closer to the classic Hebraic-Christian view of life than is the contemporary Western evangelical's segregated view."[768]

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[767]David Graber, "Native Hymns, Music and Dance in Worship," workshop, 27 July 2004.

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See Edwin M. Yamauchi "The Gnostics" in *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1977), 98. See also Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (Ventura,

Twiss argues that cultural syncretism is a "fact of life" and there is nothing wrong with it.[769] He feels strongly that Native art, music, dances, pow-wows, sweat lodges, languages, drums, and regalia can be used for God's glory to bring the Gospel to all parts of the world. In preparation for this, there must be complete reconciliation between Anglo Americans and Native Americans so that all bitterness and resentment on both sides is resolved. For Twiss, syncretism is wrong when it adds to, subtracts from, or replaces Christ's death and resurrection for all people. Twiss denounces the Native American Church as wrong because it adds hallucinatory drugs (peyote) to the message of the Bible to bring participants closer to God. But for Twiss, there is nothing more beautiful on earth than when indigenous tribes from every part of the world get together and praise God, each in their traditional garb, and with their rituals and music. He admits that

> when attempting to redeem cultures–sorting out the usable from the unusable–there is a need to be cautious so that we do not cross the line into syncretistic practices that combine idolatrous or occultic spiritual ceremonies with Christian ways and doctrines. At the same time, [Twiss does] not want fleshly fear to be a primary deterrent to discovering a more Native cultural expression of ...Christian faith.[770]

Twiss lists several reasons for the failure of Christian missions among indigenous peoples. First, missionaries believed that their cultural ways were superior to Native life ways and imposed their civilization onto their converts. Second, North American evangelical ministers saw no value in Native believers, so they kept them from key leadership roles. Missionaries have taken a "top-down approach" with which they have said, perhaps not audibly but through their actions: "I have no need of you. I don't need your customs, your arts,

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CA: Regal Books, 2000), 92-94.

[769]Twiss, 131.

[770]Twiss, 82-83.

your society, your language, concepts or perspectives."[771] Often they also implied that the history, art, language, and lifeways of Native people were not worth preserving and practicing.

Do Twiss's criticisms apply to Mennonite missions? Certainly, they did their part to preserve Native languages. But Mennonites have been so afraid of syncretism that they do not even want to mention the word.[772] Because of their fear, they were guilty of trying to replace Native cultural syncretism with their own practices, which likely were syncretic as well since Mennonites have journeyed through many lands in their pilgrimage and added new customs and rituals along the way. Mennonites were late in learning that there is nothing wrong with prayer that is offered with sage, cedar, and sweet grass when the prayer is to the creator, the one God. The drum can be used for worship as well as the piano or the organ. Perhaps most members of the Mennonite constituency still do not realize that such cultural syncretism has great value and is necessary for Native peoples to worship sincerely, in their own way. Only in this way can there be Native Christians, where indigenous people can be both Native and Christian. When they are not allowed to incorporate their own ways into worship experiences, they continue to practice them secretly. There is inherent risk in indigenization. The Elwell Evangelical Dictionary draws attention to this danger: "In the striving by missionaries for an indigenous national church with a contextualized gospel, the danger of syncretism is ever

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[771]Twiss, 27, 56-58.

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As mentioned in chapter three, in the German language syncretism was defined in the nineteenth century as *Mischerei* meaning a mishmash of religions, rather than *Mischung*, defined as blending or mixture. Thus the word had pejorative overtones. See "Syncretism" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, Vol. 13 (Macmillan Reference, 2005), 8926.

present in attempts at accommodation, adjustment, and adaptation."[773] However, to avoid contextualization (indigenization) brings the danger of total failure to missions since missionaries cannot expect Native peoples to divorce themselves from their history and their culture.

After 1960, Mennonite missionaries who had close contact with Native peoples, both in the United States and in Canada exhibited marked changes in attitude. Through the years, they increasingly recognized the importance of dialogue, mutuality, and equality with the local people. Henry Neufeld expressed it this way: "We went in with everything to teach, thinking they had nothing to give. But we changed our minds. We learned from them."[774] But many constituency members still needed to come to a place of cultural relativity–where they regarded other cultures as different and unique but not inferior. They did not realize that there were always three contexts in cross-cultural communications–the culture in which the Bible was written, the culture or the one who interprets it, and the culture of the receiver. Protestants, including Mennonites seemed to think that the biblical culture and their culture are one and the same. Paul Hiebert, Mennonite Brethren anthropologist with many years of experience in cross-cultural settings, defines cultural relativism as "the belief that all cultures are equally good–that no culture has the right to stand in judgment over the others." He goes on to say that Christians should realize that the Bible, as the divine revelation of God, stands "in judgment of all cultures, affirming the good in human creativity and condemning the evil." Thus Hiebert

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S.R. Imbach, Elwell Evangelical Dictionary. Retrieved from http://mb-soft.com/believe/indexa.html. Accessed on 7 February 2005.

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Henry Neufeld, interview with David Balzer, 30 January 2000 on Connecting Points, CFAM.

believes that no culture is perfect, and that there is good and evil in both Native and western cultures that should be submitted to the judgment of God.[775]

Back in the 1960s, Harold Fehderau, a Mennonite Brethren missionary linguist in the Congo, had the following surprising (for that time) insight: "We want to avoid the historical fallacy of seeking to condemn mission work of the past in the light of present perspectives....However, it is in place to reproach those who continue to work today with attitudes and methods that belong to a past age." Fehdrau observed that whenever two different cultures meet, each will invariably prefer its own way of life and think the other is strange.[776] We should not judge the missionaries of the past by present standards; however, with today's knowledge about different but equal cultures, the Mennonite constituency needs to be willing to become more aware and to recognize Native peoples as brothers and sisters in the church.

Summary

In the preface to this study, I asked many questions. Some have been answered, others have not. More issues have been raised in the body of the study. I will summarize the answers to questions I have been able to address, and then highlight the unanswered questions, the problem areas, the enigmas, the dilemmas.

The main purpose of this study has been to compare and contrast General Conference Mennonite missions in Oklahoma, Montana, and Arizona with Manitoba's Mennonite Pioneer

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Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 1985), 101-103.

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Harold W. Fehderau, "Missions and the Younger Churches," in *The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J.B. Toews*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), 266-267.

Mission/Native Ministries. Differences were directly related to the earlier time in which General Conference missions were functioning. In 1880 to 1900, missionaries were more under government control than during the later time period when MPM began. Consequently, they were also more like other Protestant missions. They tied Christianity with "civilization" and worked towards assimilation of Native peoples to a much greater extent than did the later Canadian mission. Like mainline Protestant missions, they faced the same problems of resistance and slow growth.

Although there were some differences, methods and attitudes seem to be congruent or analogous in the same time periods even though MPM/NM began much later. Both in the United States and in Canada, missionaries and their boards thought of Native peoples as "heathen" but "redeemable." Furthermore, they thought results would come more easily and quickly than they did in both countries. Since attitudes of both American General Conference missions and Manitoba MPM/NM changed in the same period, there was little that Manitoba Mennonite missions could learn from their American counterparts. Attitudes of those who had contact with Native communities changed in both countries in the 1960s and 70s. Missionaries found that they were not only teachers but they could also be learners. Changes came as people of both cultures got to know each other and appreciate what each had to give to the other.

In both the United States General Conference and in the Manitoba Mennonite Pioneer/Native Ministries missions, a turning point came in the 1960s and 70s. Societal upheavals such as the quiet revolution in Quebec, the Second Vatican Council, the civil rights movement in the United States, opposition to the Vietnam War, and the women's liberation movement challenged "long-held traditions and practices." The church was impacted by

society, resulting in a broader ecumenism and more tolerance. As a result of the civil rights movement, Native people in both United States and Canada "began to express their identity with greater clarity and intensity."[777] Mennonites had to come to terms with these new realities, and they began to wrestle more seriously with cross-cultural issues.

The turning points in General Conference missions and MPM/NM mirrored changes of thought that were happening in society. Missionaries and their Boards became more tolerant and dialogical, although a few years later than society at large became more accepting of other cultures. John Webster Grant notes about Roman Catholic and other Protestant churches: "Signs of a significant change of missionary attitude began to appear only with the loss of confidence in European capability that accompanied the breakdown of the colonial system."[778] Changes in Mennonite attitudes, although coming later, reflected attitudes of mainline denominations and of the general public. If Mennonite missions mirrored society, Mennonites were perhaps not as separate from "the world" as they liked to think they were.

Yet Mennonites in the constituency continued to be more comfortable when mission stations were far away, almost inaccessible, as in earlier years Conferences became less predictable in the 1970s when Native delegates from the reserves attended and brought in some of their ways. Intermarriage between their sons or daughters and Native Christians was unacceptable to most southern Mennonites. They were more contented in an ethnically pure, traditional church than in a congregation made up of different cultures. From their perspective, it was better to do missions at arms length.

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[777]Adolf Ens, 130, 150.

[778]Grant, 233.

In the 1960s and 1970s, churches were planted and growing while the Mennonite constituencies were confronted with pointed questions about their responsibilities to and acceptance of Native Christians. However, interest began to wane in the 1980s and financial restraints limited the work that could be done. Following the reorganization of the General Conference in 1999, Native Ministries was cut back drastically in Manitoba to the point where Native Christians and personnel were hurt and puzzled about the future. Native Christians who were connected to the Mennonites met in Native Assemblies to encourage one another.

How do Native people reflect upon Mennonite missionaries who came to their reserves? At various points in recent decades, Native Ministries personnel and Board members put the question to the people. The answer was almost invariably that the communities wanted the missionaries to stay. They have been very positive about children's programs run with the help of southern Mennonite young people. Native hospitality and politeness may play a part, but the wishes to continue programs seem genuine. When I spoke with Native or mixed ancestry people at the Faith Bible Camp in the summers of 2003 and 2004, they mentioned again and again how much they appreciated Mennonite teachers and missionaries who come back to celebrate special anniversaries with them. Henry Neufeld, who has kept close connections with the Pauingassi people and with Christians on other reserves, is often called upon to conduct funerals or attend celebrations. Henry and Elna continue to be much appreciated by Manitoba's northern peoples.

The Dilemma of Mennonite Missions

The Webster Dictionary defines the word "dilemma" as "a problem seemingly incapable of a satisfactory solution," or "a situation involving choice between equally unsatisfactory alternatives." The realization of the dilemma between being a separated people

and becoming involved in missions outreach, was likely, whether consciously or subconsciously, the reason why Mennonites were so reluctant and slow to begin mission to Native peoples.

One dilemma for Mennonites was maintaining ethnicity or ethnic purity. John Redekop, a political science teacher and Mennonite Brethren Conference Moderator, wrote a book on the ethnicity of the Mennonite Brethren. He defines ethnicity as a "distinctive identity which is rooted in some kind of a distinctive sense of its history." He continues that "A common history, a collective biography, a transgenerational cultural legacy and a shared fate constitute the ethnic glue which fuses Mennonites together above and beyond the religious experience."[779] Ethnicity has been a particularly strong factor in southern Manitoba, where many Mennonites shared common experiences during their flight from Russia, in refugee camps, and during resettlement in South America or in Canada. Are Mennonites able and willing to include Native Mennonite converts who do not have the same history or backgrounds in their social circles? Newcomers in a church will not stay unless they feel nurtured with friendship and sharing outside of the formal church service. Can Mennonites give up ethnic purity in their churches? Esther Wenger thought it was less difficult to begin Mennonite Churches in Oklahoma, Montana, and Arizona than in Manitoba. Based on the list of churches with the word "Mennonite" in their names that were part of the Mennonite Leaders

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Redekop takes this definition from Donald Kraybill whose definition includes all Mennonites. John H. Redekop, *Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren: A People Apart* (Winnipeg, Manitoba and Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1987), 5.

Council in 1999, Wenger seems to be correct.[780] Could this be because ethnicity has been such a strong factor among members of southern Manitoba churches?

Another dilemma is the matter of religious purity. Robert J. Suderman, Executive Secretary of the Ministries Commission of Mennonite Church Canada, wrote a series of articles on missions in the *Canadian Mennonite* in 1999. He gave some reasons for the reluctance of the Mennonite missionary movement at that time. One reason was that people feared that "the gospel in all parts of the world seems to accommodate itself too much to local cultures. This acculturation of the gospel is often called syncretism."[781] As mentioned above, Mennonites have feared syncretism because they, and many other Protestants, believe that there is only one way to God and that is through Jesus. They fear that this way will be jeopardized by tolerance of other ways.

Present-day Native Christians such as Richard Twiss and Donovan Jacobs think a syncretic religion is risky because the "Jesus Way" may be compromised by giving equal credence to other ways such as the Peyote Way. They separate cultural syncretism from religious syncretism (mixing Christian with false religions, as Twiss defines it). Twiss believes that Native Christians can express their worship with the drum, the sweat lodge, and the sweet grass, sage, and cedar smudge because these are examples of cultural syncretism. He warns, however, against the Native American Church which, he writes, "is an attempt to form one new religion out of two old belief systems–a religion neither Christian nor

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Nine Native churches included the word "Mennonite" in their names in 1999. See *Directory of Mennonite Missions* (1998-1999), 196.

781 *Canadian Mennonite* (8 November 1999): 6.

traditionally Native."[782] Yet, most Native cultures have no boundaries between their natural and their spiritual worlds. How then can they separate cultural syncretism from religious syncretism? How can converts retain the belief that Jesus is the only way to God while respecting and embracing traditional and new religions, such as the Native American Church, as well?

Has it been possible for Native converts to become Christian while retaining their Native identity? In the early years, both General Conference and Mennonite Pioneer missionaries worked to root out and replace traditional religions. However, the question of Native identity and culture was addressed often in the 1970s and it seemed that progress was made–that Native Christians could and did still honor their heritage. Lawrence Hart, a Cheyenne Mennonite minister, is proud of his grandfather John Peak Heart, who was a prominent Cheyenne peyote leader, and of his Cheyenne culture.[783]

Another enigma concerns Anabaptist distinctives versus denominational cooperation. Early Anabaptists gave their lives for the belief that baptism should be administered only upon adult confession of faith. Yet the Pauingassi Ojibwa were confused when Henry Neufeld refused to baptize their infants as the former United Church missionary, Luther Schuetze, had done. In the twenty-first century, most Native Christians at former MPM stations want a community church rather than a Mennonite church. Walter Franz described the situation in 2002 this way:

> Denominationalism has been divisive in the past so we need to be careful....We will continue to be in dialogue with native traditional leaders and leaders of other denominations about this....Part of the role of healing and bridge-building is to support

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[782]Twiss, 126, 127, 132.

[783]Raylene Hinz-Penner, "Writing a Life," (*Mennonite Life*, September 2004): 6-9.

indigenous churches in native communities rather than building our own. This is not always understood in the Mennonite constituency.[784]

Some questions the constituency has had to face are as follows: What happens to the Mennonite peace position in community churches that include people from all denominations? Adult baptism upon confession of faith and Mennonite pacifism are central to Anabaptism. Is it necessary for Mennonite missionaries to give up the Anabaptist core beliefs that make them different from other Protestants in order to attract Native converts and establish community churches? Do Mennonites still have anything distinctive left to offer? Is it not the freely chosen decision to follow Jesus in a life of peace that is attractive? Changes in methods and attitudes were necessary but if the distinctive core is lost, what is left that is worth preserving? If changes that took place in Mennonite missions to Native peoples reflected the changes that took place in the wider world, then Mennonites are no longer a "Separate People" as Frank H. Epp once called them.[785] These are some of the difficult questions that remain unanswered for many Mennonites today.

As of 2005, funding has been cut and most missionaries have to raise their own support. This could mean that the constituency is no longer interested in missions, since Mennonite people are not poorer than they were fifty years ago. Reorganization and restructuring of conferences and mission committees have not had a positive effect on missions to Native peoples. In 1960, MPM came under the umbrella of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada rather than the Bergthaler Church. A new missions committee was elected. Of this change Gerbrandt wrote: "Although the committee tried to be enthusiastic, the former

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[784]*Canadian Mennonite* (7 October 2002): 10.

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Frank H. Epp's first volume in the *Mennonites in Canada* series is titled *Mennonites in Canada: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974).

excitement was lacking. A certain concreteness had been lost."[786] As noted above, in 1999 the General Conference, the Mennonite Church, and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada united and then divided along national lines. Restructuring of programs was completed in 2002. In 2003 there were major cuts in the budget which likely were related to restructuring. Most of the NM personnel had to leave their positions.

Since 2003, Mennonite Church Canada Witness has encouraged partnerships between southern Manitoba churches and northern Manitoba Native churches.[787] For example, the Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church is in a partnership with the Riverton Fellowship Circle. Members of the two groups get together for worship, fellowship, and pot luck suppers. Sargent Mennonite Church has raised money by organizing a jamboree and a pot luck lunch to help the Riverton group pay the salary of a part-time leader. The goal is for Riverton to become independent in time.

Why continue to conduct missions if there are so many problems? In spite of past mistakes and failures and in spite of present day doubts, Suderman expresses the Mennonite perspective that the attributes of truth, justice, faith, the Bible, and salvation "continue to be relevant for our world. The church should not keep this vision to itself."[788] Another reason is that the northern churches look to southern Mennonite ministers and helpers who have been with them through the years to continue to teach their children and to nurture them in the faith. Native converts have become friends of missionaries, teachers, and of all those who have

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[786]Gerbrandt, 342.

[787]See *World of Witness 2004-2005*, 11.

[788]*Canadian Mennonite* (20 December 1999): 6.

formed bonds in some way. They want to continue these contacts and friendships, and the mutual understandings that they can bring.

This study is intended to fill a considerable gap in the historiography and history of Native missions in North America. At the outset, I noted that Mennonite missions have been largely neglected by historians, perhaps because they were minor players in the United States context, and began so recently in Manitoba, compared with the activities of other denominations. However, even in Manitoba they now have a seventy-year history in need of attention. And their study enhances our perspectives both on the history of Mennonites in North America, and as a case study of how mission dynamics have played out, on the ground, in settings not previously examined elsewhere.

My argument has been that like Native peoples, missionaries, boards, and constituencies were not static. Their methods and attitudes changed over time. The case studies of Samuel Haury, H.R. Voth, Rodolphe Petter, Jake Unrau, Henry Neufeld, Edwin Brandt, Otto Hamm, and Ernie Sawatzky highlight how different each one of these Mennonite missionaries was, in their interests and training and in the way they went about their work among the Native peoples. Most of them made huge changes in methods and attitudes as they related to the people among whom they lived. For this reason, generalizations about missionaries are as erroneous and misguided as generalizations about the Native peoples of North America. Generalizations sometimes carry with them a certain element of prejudice, a stigma. It is not right to submit missionaries, at all times and all places, to such a stigma, just as it is not right to subject Native peoples to this kind of bigotry. This study has demonstrated that each missionary was different and that most missionaries, and their boards, changed over time, as did the broader societies in which they lived.

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