

“In the world but not of it”: Old Colony Mennonites, Evangelicalism and Contemporary Canadian Culture--A Case Study of Osler Mission Chapel (1974-94)¹

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“One of the great and relatively unexplained ironies of [North] American religious history is that many people in immigrant-based denominations found in Fundamentalism an attractive modern American Christianity” (Joel A. Carpenter).²

“By opening themselves to American Protestantism, Mennonites . . . found a religiously approved way to become more [North] American” (Theron F. Schlabach).³

In 1992 a national television documentary featured Old Colony (OC) Mennonites involved in smuggling vast quantities of marihuana into Canada.⁴ This particular group had, after many decades of living as *die Stillen im Lande* (the quiet in the land), successfully managed to avoid attracting a great deal of media and scholarly attention.⁵ The recent media scrutiny

¹This essay is a revised version of a presentation made to the Canadian Society of Church History, University of Calgary, June 1994. I wish to express my gratitude to the leaders of Osler Mission Chapel for their gracious co-operation in providing information and for their many helpful suggestions.

²“The Fundamentalist Leaven and the Rise of an Evangelical United Front,” in *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1984), 275.

³*Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1988), 296. Elsewhere, Schlabach has remarked that “whatever else it was, revivalism was for American Mennonites a potent agent of modernization” (“Mennonites, Revivalism, Modernity--1683-1850,” *Church History* 48 [1979]: 415).

⁴“Mennonite Mob,” *Fifth Estate*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 10 March 1992.

⁵Developments among traditional Mennonites have generally been overlooked by Mennonite historians in favour of the more “progressive” Mennonite groups (see e.g., Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* [Toronto: Macmillan, 1982]), or the more easily identifiable and accessible Hutterites. This historiographical prejudice is rather thinly disguised at times (see e.g., how the OC Mennonites are referred to as “culturally retarded,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v., “Old Colony Mennonites,” by Cornelius Krahn; and C. Henry

notwithstanding most members of the Canadian public still know little of the differences between Mennonite groups in Canada in general and of the unique characteristics of the OC in particular.

The OC Mennonites are a branch of the Anabaptist tradition that dates back to the early Reformation. Following several migrations to different parts of Europe, they became part of a larger group of Russian Mennonite immigrants that arrived in Canada during the 1870s. Many of the immigrants coming to Manitoba at this time were from the Chortiza settlement which was also known as the Old Colony.⁶ These immigrants were joined by others from the two daughters of Chortiza, Bergthal and Fürstenland. Varying responses to the municipal system of land division and government schools divided the Mennonites into several factions during the 1890s.⁷ The OC Mennonite Church emerged during the 1890s as the largest, most traditional Mennonite group (their official name was the Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde with the term Altkolonier added through common usage, but they were also referred to as the Reinlaender or the Fuerstenlaender). Two decades later many OC Mennonites re-settled on or around one of two land reserves in Saskatchewan located near Hague-Osler-Rosthern (north of Saskatoon) and south of Swift Current (west of Regina). Shortly after World War I, they became acutely concerned about the intended direction of government policies concerning public education. In 1918 the provincial government in Saskatchewan decreed that the control of all public schools failing to meet certain standards would be transferred into the hands of the government, and that English would be the sole language of instruction in all public schools. Most OC schools did not meet the minimum standards. Numerous petitions did little to relieve what they felt to be a significant threat. As a result, about 8,000 OC Mennonites migrated to Mexico and Paraguay during the 1920s.⁸ Subsequent migrations involving Saskatchewan OC Mennonites took place

Smith who describes the OC Mennonite resistance to acculturation as “deluded and foolish,” in *The Story of the Mennonites* [Berne, IN: Mennonite Book Concern, 1941, 650]). Nevertheless, there have been several scholarly studies done on the OC Mennonites: see the work done by Leo Driedger, “A Sect in a Modern Society: A Case Study, the Old Colony Mennonites of Saskatchewan,” M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1955; “Saskatchewan Old Colony Mennonites,” *Mennonite Life* 13, No. 2 (April 1958): 63-66; and “Mennonite Change: The Old Colony Revisited, 1955-1977,” *Mennonite Life* 32, No. 4 (1977): 4-12. Richard Friesen has also studied the OC Mennonites: “Old Colony Mennonite Settlements in Saskatchewan: A Study of Settlement Change,” M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1975; and “Saskatchewan Mennonite Settlements: The Modification of Old World Settlement Patterns,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 9, No. 2 (1977): 72-90. The most thorough book-length study has been done by sociologist Calvin W. Redekop (*The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969]). One OC community in northern Alberta has also received some attention in medical research for a unique disorder known as Tourette’s Syndrome, which manifests such bizarre symptoms as spontaneous and profuse swearing (see Martine A. Jaworski, Jon D. Slater, Alberto Severini, et al., “Unusual Clustering of diseases in a Canadian Old Colony (Chortiza) Mennonite kindred and community,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 138 [1 June 1988]: 1017-1025; “Inherited Diseases in North American Mennonites: Focus on Old Colony [Chortiza] Mennonites,” *American Journal of Medical Genetics* 32 [1989]; and “Genetic Conditions Among Canadian Mennonites: Evidence for a Founder Effect among the Old Colony [Chortiza] Mennonites,” *Clinical and Investigative Medicine* 12, No. 2 [1989]).

⁶The name “Old Colony” was given to the Chortiza Mennonite settlement as the first (1789) and to distinguish it from the “New Colony,” i.e., the Molotschna settlement established in 1803.

⁷The most “progressive” was the Bergthal Church, with the Sommerfelder and Chortizer groups somewhere in between (Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 2nd ed. [Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981], 305).

⁸Church leaders made it very clear that all church members were expected to participate in the move to Mexico. However, for a variety of reasons only two-thirds (3,200) of the OC members in Manitoba, one-third (1,200) of those

during the 1930s and 40s to Fort Vermilion in northern Alberta, and during the 1960s to Prespatou in northern British Columbia.⁹ The OC Mennonite Church remains one of the few Mennonite groups that has consistently resisted cultural accommodation and theological innovation. Of ultimate concern has been the preservation of their way of life which they safeguarded by minimizing contact with outside influences. This priority has been the driving force behind the on-going search for geographically-isolated locales.¹⁰

In contrast to their collective display of conformity a steady trickle of dissenters have left the OC church during the past seventy years. Although many were dissatisfied with the rigorous OC resistance to change and desired ecclesiastical reform these individual voices of dissent never organized for the purpose of expediting change. Many joined other Mennonite denominations including the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Mennonite Brethren,¹¹ and especially the Rudnerweider (later renamed the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference [EMMC]), a movement that began in 1936 as a major schism from the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church in Manitoba. The EMMC congregations established in the Hague-Warman area during the 1940s attracted many OC people.¹² Some opted to discontinue entirely their association with any church.

In November 1974 a group of approximately 70 individuals living in the Hague-Osler-Warman area decided to leave the OC Church.¹³ The event marked the largest exodus out of the OC church in Saskatchewan by a group of people interested in becoming more (rather than less) culturally integrated.¹⁴ The group organized a congregation in Osler that became known as Osler

living near Swift Current and about one-quarter (1,000) of those living near Hague made the move. It was generally the poorer families who had been unable to sell their farms for the expected price that were forced to stay behind in Canada.

⁹In recent years thousands (ca. 20,000) of Mexican Mennonites, many of whom belong(ed) to the OC church, have returned to Canada as immigrants in search of employment. For most the adjustment to Canadian life has been difficult: not only must they learn a new language (a task that is exacerbated by the fact that many of these immigrants are barely literate), but they must also adjust to a very open society with comparatively few rules after having lived in a very closed colony system.

¹⁰Equally important was the economic impetus which lay behind the later migrations as the group confronted the necessity of expanding the land base so that members of the church could continue farming.

¹¹The Mennonite Brethren were the most aggressive in actively seeking converts from among other Mennonite groups. Reports from MB missionaries indicate however that they found work among OC Mennonites difficult and discouraging. This was in part due to their rigorous insistence on baptism by immersion (see Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* [Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987], 66-67).

¹²There are many similarities between the Rudnerweider story and the OMC (see Jack Heppner, *Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider/Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, 1937-1987* [Winnipeg: Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, 1987]. The most significant difference is that the EMMC managed to incorporate evangelical emphases without negating entirely historic Anabaptist distinctives like nonresistance.

¹³Leo Driedger, a sociologist and long-time observer of the OC Mennonites in Saskatchewan, rightly suggested that this exodus was one of the most significant developments to take place among the OC Mennonites in Saskatchewan between 1955 and 1977 ("Mennonite Change: The Old Colony Revisited, 1955-1977," *Mennonite Life* 32, No. 4 [1977]: 6).

¹⁴Precise membership and attendance statistics for the OC Mennonite Church are difficult to obtain. In 1977, the

Mission Chapel (hereafter OMC), and that has, despite its eventual affiliation with the Chortizer Mennonite Conference (hereafter CMC) of Manitoba, functioned largely as an autonomous congregation. During its first twenty years of existence, OMC has grown to more than 240 active baptized members as well as several hundred more adherents. It quickly and decisively rejected many OC practices and emphases. In their stead, leaders of the new congregation substituted theological emphases and practices they had become familiar with through their contact with evangelical radio broadcasts, publications, travelling speakers, transdenominational Bible schools and Bible camps during the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

This article examines the changes which took place among the people of OMC as they moved away from their OC traditions and aligned themselves with many of the emphases and practices found within North American evangelical Protestantism.¹⁵ Although the individuals involved continue to describe this event as a spiritual awakening, and without minimizing this as a valid explanation, equally important but usually unacknowledged were the sociological and

first year in which OC Mennonites are included, the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* cites the Saskatchewan division of the OC Church in Canada as having 1087 members. The number who regularly attended one of the four OC churches in Saskatchewan during the 1970s and 1980s was significantly lower than this number. The 1990 edition of the *Mennonite World Handbook* is more precise: it lists 415 baptized members estimating that approximately 50% of these attend services. OC numbers have been decimated still further by another recent schism in which a group left the OC to become a part of a local Berghthaler congregation in Blumenheim, a small village north-east of Saskatoon. This schism also centred around a minister, Pete Ens, who promoted certain evangelical emphases.

¹⁵By “evangelical” I refer broadly to Protestant groups that fit inside the elastic descriptive creedal quadrilateral provided by British historian David Bebbington (*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: From the 1730s to the 1980s* [London: Unwin Hyman, 1989], 1-19). In short, he suggests that, while there are many differences between the various expressions of evangelicalism during different periods of history, there are also certain continuities which unite the various groups and that get at the essence of evangelicalism. According to Bebbington, there are four essential characteristics: first, evangelicals are biblicists, that is, they have a particularly high regard for the Bible. While there are differences in the way this is expressed--some insist on the word “inerrancy,” others use “infallible,” and still others are satisfied with “trustworthy”--they all agree that the Bible is inspired by God and that it is the authoritative source of all truth about God. Second, they are crucicentric, that is, at the centre of their theological scheme is the doctrine of the cross. They believe that atonement was made to God for the penalty of human sin by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. While some argue that this death was substitutionary, and others argue it was representative, all evangelicals agree that Jesus’s death on cross was the central event of history because of the way it rescued humanity from sin. This emphasis on atonement has often eclipsed the development of other doctrines (e.g., the incarnation or creation). Third, evangelicals are conversionists: they believe that no person is naturally a Christian--all have to turn to Christ if they are to become true believers. This belief is linked to their doctrine of the cross and to the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith. And fourthly, evangelicals are activists. They believe that genuine conversion will be accompanied by action because it produces a new motivation for doing good and thereby leads to holiness (the definition of holiness resulted in some unnecessarily restrictive codes of behaviour). Action on the part of an evangelical confirms the genuineness of a spiritual experience. This explains the incredible time and energy evangelicals devote to personal piety, to efforts in spreading the gospel to others, and to philanthropic projects of all kinds. While such a definition is primarily descriptive, many evangelicals also use this quadrilateral of priorities in a creedal sense; it is for them a permanent deposit of faith which has been, and still needs to be preserved. Evangelicalism has also been referred to as a kind of loose religious “denomination,” that is “a dynamic movement with common heritages, common tendencies, an identity, and an organic character” (George Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], x). With some minor variations, Bebbington’s definition is widely accepted by Canadian and American scholars (e.g., Michael Gauvreau, “Beyond the Half-Way House: Evangelicalism and the Shaping of English Canadian Culture,” *Acadiensis* 20, No. 2 [1991]: 166).

cultural changes accompanying this transition. Although the OC Mennonites who formed OMC comprise only a small minority of the Mennonites in Canada, their attraction towards, and their utilization of, evangelicalism is representative of many other Mennonites. The story of OMC therefore offers insight to the larger question of why Mennonite groups in Canada have historically been, and continue to be, attracted to and influenced by North American evangelicalism. A detailed study of developments within this congregation exposes many of the tensions and frustrations experienced by ethnic groups struggling with acculturation, and the role sometimes played by North American evangelicalism in facilitating and accelerating the process.¹⁶

Old Colony Mennonite Distinctives

Prior to analyzing developments in the life of OMC I will summarize briefly the distinctive practices and beliefs of the OC Mennonites in Saskatchewan, and highlight the transitions that had already taken place among this group of Mennonites prior to 1974.¹⁷

OC Mennonites used a dialect called Plautdietsch (Low-German) among themselves, reserving the more formal High German as the language of the church. Through their own German private schools the OC were committed to giving their children a basic Christian education that would provide skills in reading, writing and arithmetic (usually only up to grade six). Education beyond an elementary level was deemed not only unnecessary but also undesirable. Those who either chose not to, or were unable to, migrate to Mexico during the 1920s eventually conceded to the provincial government by sending their children to government public schools. Until the late 1960s few obtained more than a grade eight education.

Although the OC Mennonites did not have a uniform dress code like the Hutterites, they did dress plainly preferring dark colours. Women wore dark dresses, usually dark blue or black, with flowered aprons and black bonnets. Their hair was kept long, and was commonly wrapped in buns at the top or back of the head. Married women wore black or dark blue embroidered kerchiefs in church. Jewellery (including wedding bands) and neckties were considered ostentatious. While the dress codes have relaxed somewhat over the last few decades, “modern” fashions are still rigorously eschewed.

Roles for men and women were clearly defined. Should a young woman marry, she was expected to be a wife and mother responsible for child care, doing household tasks, making clothes, cooking, gardening and preserving food. Because OC Mennonites rejected the use of artificial methods of birth-control large families were the norm. The husband was regarded as the provider and the one with ultimate responsibility for all financial decisions. Marriages were considered permanent arrangements and because divorce was punishable by excommunication it was virtually non-existent.

Central within OC communities was the church, a plain and until recently unpainted building (the absence of paint once served as a visible sign of humility). The interior is painted

¹⁶See Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), 226ff for a discussion of the distinctions between acculturation and assimilation. Robert Burkinshaw makes the observation that evangelicalism assisted in the “Canadianization” of Mennonite groups in British Columbia (“Strangers and Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917-1981,” Ph.D. Diss., University of British Columbia, 1988, 286-295).

¹⁷A vast range of information on OC life can be found in *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, 1895-1995* (Saskatoon: Houghton Boston Printers, 1995). Other helpful descriptions of OC life can be found in J.G. Guenter, “Lifestyle of a ‘Unique Sect,’” in *Men of Steele: Saskatchewan Valley Mennonite Settlers and Their Descendants* (Saskatoon: by the author, 1981); and in Heather Robertson, *Grassroots* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1973).

an austere blue-grey. Men and women use separate entrances and are seated apart on long benches which were, until the 1960s, without backs. The structure of services has changed little over the years: they generally last two or more hours and consist of a combination of singing, silent prayers, an “introduction” to the sermon and a lengthy sermon. Behaviour within the building is noticeably hushed and subdued reflecting the veneration given to the place of worship.

Seated in a place of honour on one side of the pulpit facing the congregation are men known as *Vorsaenger* who lead congregational singing. They are seated in order of seniority with the one nearest the pulpit having the longest service. Using the revered *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, a hymnal without musical notation compiled by their ancestors in Prussia and Russia,¹⁸ singing is done without instrumental accompaniment and in unison to symbolize church unity--four-part harmony is forbidden. The tempo is deliberate and slow: one stanza can easily take three or four minutes to complete.

Seated on the other side of the pulpit also facing the congregation are the ministers. Theoretically all members of the OC community are considered equal but in reality ministers, as the spokespersons for God, are given a considerable degree of respect and power.¹⁹ Any male is eligible to be chosen as a minister--a position held for life without remuneration. Although ministers are selected from local congregations they serve as ministers to the entire OC church. Consequently, they all take their turn in the “circuit,” a preaching rotation encompassing all congregations in the area. In this way the strengths and weaknesses of the various ministers are distributed evenly throughout the entire area. Formal training for clergy is considered unnecessary. Ministers wear black clothes, and black robes as symbols of their authority. Hand-copied sermons handed down through successive generations are read: eye-contact with the congregation and expressive motions with hands or shoulders are avoided while preaching. The bishop, who is elected from among the ministers by the brotherhood (all baptized males), is the undisputed leader of the church. He alone administers the rites of communion and baptism, although all ministers can conduct wedding ceremonies.

Church membership is attained by baptism after a period of catechetical instruction. Theoretically members join the church voluntarily; in practice it was a matter of social necessity as a prerequisite for marriage.²⁰ The necessity of being baptised prior to being considered a member of the church and able to participate in communion led some to hold a view that resembles baptismal regeneration. While eschewed by their catechism many OC people nevertheless developed, at least implicitly, a sacramental view of communion that is manifested by the special deference given its bi-annual observance. Many have observed how those who seldom attended services would be certain to attend communion. The OC Mennonites used a white handkerchief to hold the bread after accepting it from the bishop; the elements were not to

¹⁸This hymnal was derived from the Dutch *Veelerhande Schriftuerlijke Liedekens* which had been in use in Holland since the days of the Reformation. It is the only book carried to church by members and is given as much respect as the Bible (Leonard Doell, *The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan* [Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1987], 52-54).

¹⁹For a discussion of stratification, class structure and distribution of power among OC Mennonites see Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites*, 93-102.

²⁰See Redekop's discussion of how baptism, church membership and marriage serve as rites of passage within the community (*Old Colony Mennonites*, 33).

be touched with one's hands.²¹ The church has no written constitution: the catechism is the full extent of its explication of doctrine. Rules are unwritten and interpreted by church leaders based upon their understanding of OC traditions. Despite the ambiguity and differing opinions over the years concerning the definition of worldliness, leaders agree that the church ought to be separate, i.e., recognizably distinct from "the world." Deviance is understood as a manifestation of worldliness: conformity is enforced by the threat of excommunication and social ostracism.

The early OC Mennonites in Saskatchewan were almost exclusively a community of farmers. Many (not all) initially settled in communal villages as they had done in Manitoba. Responsible for the administration of each village was the *Schultze* (administrator). Despite being elected by an assembly of all the landowners of the village, his authority was subordinate to the church which could use the threat of excommunication to ensure conformity in both civil and religious matters. Early on a variety of forces combined to prompt the gradual dissolution of these village settlements. The reasons for this disintegration varied greatly from place to place but often included the desire for a greater degree of economic independence on the part of individual family units.²² Although some continued to live in these villages (several of these villages are still in existence), the communal system that accompanied it had largely vanished as OC farmers by the early twentieth century as OC farmers increasingly preferred to reside on their own property.²³

Several other potent forces, in addition to the breakdown of the village system, converged to elicit change among the OC Mennonites in Saskatchewan. First, the acceptance of technology gradually weakened the boundaries of rural isolation. Although OC church leaders initially banned those who acquired motor-driven vehicles, this prohibition appears to have been relatively short-lived. OC leaders correctly anticipated that the versatility and the increased mobility that automobiles offered would constitute a distinct threat to their segregated way of life. But cars did not have a major impact on OC community life until the late 1950s when the combination of improved roads and better vehicles facilitated faster access to urban centres. Many of the Mennonite villages and towns in the original Hague-Rosthern reserve now function as rural suburbs of Saskatoon.

There appear to have been few inhibitions in utilizing technological advances that would enhance the economic viability of farming operations. Many farms had electricity installed during the 1950s (it was eventually installed in the church buildings during the late 1960s and early 1970s), and radios, which brought the voices of the world directly into OC homes, were widely accepted (television was resisted more vigorously). The openness towards technology displayed by Saskatchewan OC Mennonites has often been contrasted to the resistance that

²¹Heppner, *Search for Renewal*, 75.

²²Because land was titled in the names of individuals, the village system required a high degree of co-operation. The lack of co-operation by even a small minority of villagers easily threatened the entire system by withdrawing a portion of the land base in the shared open-field system. Many also found the narrow fields unsuitable for the technological advancements in agriculture which was rapidly becoming more machine-based. Many who had homesteaded outside of the original boundaries of the reserve were required to live, and make improvements, on their particular piece of land. Moreover, the migrations away from Saskatchewan between 1920 and 1940 further fragmented many of the original village settlements (see Friesen, "Saskatchewan Mennonite Settlements," 72-90).

²³Much of Leo Driedger's work on the OC focuses on the physical survival of these villages as the key indicators of change among the OC Mennonites. This ignores the fact that by the 1940s most OC members did not in fact live in these villages thereby obscuring other factors that precipitated change.

characterized those who had migrated to Mexico.²⁴ The migrations to Mexico siphoned away the stronger leaders which accentuated a slackening of discipline and practice among those who remained behind in Canada. Those who stayed behind were, therefore, more vulnerable to cultural accommodation.

Second, by the 1950s the land base in the Saskatoon area surrounding the original land reserves was no longer able to support the rapidly growing number of OC Mennonites. The number of available on-farm jobs also diminished with the increased mechanization of farming operations. As a result, many were forced to look for employment in more urban areas. The desire to avoid having their young people work outside the community prompted a search among some SK OC Mennonites for additional land in a suitably isolated location. In the early 1960s, a large number of OC people migrated to Prespatou, BC which again decimated local leadership.

Many of those who remained in Saskatchewan had little option but to look for outside employment. Those who remained had little choice but to look for outside employment which exposed members to different lifestyle options. Because the OC church strongly disapproved of members actually living in urban centres an alternative bedroom community (now known as Martensville) emerged north of Saskatoon. It kept many blue-collar OC families from living in Saskatoon while allowing them easy access to their jobs.²⁵ Pressure from employers annoyed by the lack of uniformity between national and OC religious holidays prompted some OC members to disregard certain traditions. This contributed to the gradual diminishment of their visible distinctiveness.²⁶

Third, over time OC members gradually lost their ability to understand and use High German, the language of the church. Although Low German was spoken in homes, due to the impact of several generations of young people who had been educated in English public schools, and the impact of a growing number of individuals who were forced to use English in the workplace,²⁷ the resolve to retain the German language gradually weakened. After an unsuccessful attempt in 1932, Sunday schools were inaugurated during the 1940s both as a vehicle for the Christian education of children and to help the upcoming generation learn the language of the church. The combination of poor curriculum, unqualified instructors and insufficient hours of instruction did little to reverse the trend among the younger generation in preferring the English language. By the mid-1960s, a combination of English and Low German was used for instruction in OC Sunday Schools.²⁸

Fourth, during the major migration of OC Mennonites to Mexico in the 1920s, many sold their land to other incoming Mennonites from Russia. These *Russlaender* Mennonites were

²⁴Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites*, 31.

²⁵Prior to the emergence of Martensville, a large group of OC families asked that an OC church be located within Saskatoon. This proposal was adamantly rejected (see Herbert Peters, "Martensville: Halfway House to Urbanization," *Mennonite Life* 23, No. 68 [October 1968]: 165).

²⁶OC Mennonites developed a practise of designating several days following certain religious festivals like Christmas, Easter and Pentecost as religious holidays. As a result, they generally paid little attention to national holidays.

²⁷Pressure for change also came from the OC men who had been drafted during World War II: many subsequently found it difficult to return to the community of their parents.

²⁸For many children, Sunday schools became the preferred alternative to sitting through what seemed like an incomprehensible and interminable church service.

better educated and much more interested in participating in Canadian culture. Participation in the alternatives offered by their churches (e.g., *Jugendvereine* [evening meetings for young people usually held on Sunday nights]), and the impact of inter-marriage led to direct contact between the two Mennonite groups and was partly responsible for a steady trickle of young people out of the OC church. Moreover, even for those OC Mennonites who did not interact directly with the *Russlaender* Mennonites, the subtle effect of religious pluralism should not be under-estimated. The inability to explain adequately the theological basis for their religious beliefs and practices hindered OC members from withstanding outreach efforts organized by more evangelical Mennonite groups.²⁹ Even for those OC Mennonites who did not interact directly with the *Russlaender* Mennonites, the subtle effect of religious pluralism should not be under-estimated. The economic success and apparently sincere religiosity of neighbouring Mennonites mitigated against the OC assumptions that faithfulness to God meant separation from the world, and that other more acculturated Mennonite groups had been forsaken by God.³⁰

As the world around them continued to change, OC leaders in Saskatchewan reluctantly permitted an increasing level of cultural accommodation. The inability to maintain complete insularity from “the world” did indeed, as suspected, increase pressure on church leaders for changes to their old, distinctive way of life. In hindsight there probably was no other choice: the only real options were either to initiate yet another migration, or attempt to retain some degree of control over the pace of change.³¹ But regardless of changes taking place on farms and within homes and schools, OC leaders rigorously maintained their adherence to traditional practices within the church: here *das Alte festhalten* became an obsession. Once part of a strategy for keeping “worldliness” at bay, the obdurate resistance to change gradually became the *raison d’être* of the OC religious system.³² Leaders needed some way by which to provide stability and a sense of security in the midst of a rapidly changing world. Maintaining consistency in matters of faith and church practice was a means for keeping their religious experience intact, and

²⁹The theology they were trying to articulate was, as a result, frequently misunderstood (see John Friesen, “Theological Developments in Canada during the 1950s and 1960s,” Paper presented at a Symposium on Mennonites in Canada, Waterloo, ON, 12 May 1988, Canadian Mennonite Brethren Studies Archive [CMBSA], Papers and Essays, No. 3, Box 17).

³⁰The economic success and sincere religiosity of these neighbouring Mennonite groups mitigated directly against the OC assumptions that faithfulness to God meant separation from the world, i.e., the maintenance of a certain distinctiveness, and that other, more acculturated, Mennonite groups had been forsaken by God (see also, Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites*, 31).

³¹The pace of change within OC communities depended on the attitude of the bishop: notable for many of those who became part of OMC was Rev. Herman Friesen (1908-1969) who was elected as a minister in 1962 after the Prespatou migration, and to the office of Bishop in 1963. His experience as a municipal councillor, and as Secretary on the local school board made him more amenable to change than both preceding and succeeding bishops. For example, Friesen supported efforts by school teachers in starting evening programs for the young people (e.g., Sunday schools, choirs, etc). He was also instrumental in initiating a popular *Owentstund* in the church which included a combination of singing and short lectures. He died in 1969 in a tragic farm accident, and was replaced by Rev. Julius Enns who had returned from Prespatou.

³²As an explanation for their tenacity in clinging to their unique religious practices, Leo Driedger has also observed how “symbolic factors,” and this could very well include religious practices, gradually became “more important in bolstering declining structural components” (“The Anabaptist Identification Ladder Plain-Urbane Continuity in Diversity,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LI, No. 4 [October 1977]: 278).

perhaps assuring themselves of unchanging eternal values. As memories of war faded, and the preoccupation with preserving particular practices increased, the ability of leaders to instill an understanding of and a commitment to Mennonite doctrinal distinctives like nonresistance diminished. Moreover, efforts to maintain religious practices as static as possible disabled the OC from revitalizing their traditions to meet new circumstances. The priority given to the preservation of religious customs without regard either for their original purpose or their present impact was a major catalyst precipitating the OMC schism.³³

The Birth of Osler Mission Chapel

The birth of OMC in 1974 centred around a young OC minister named Jake Wiebe who had been ordained to the ministry four years prior.³⁴ Wiebe was at the time the youngest of eight OC ministers. Although he had received a box of frequently used sermons from the bishop, Wiebe opted instead to preach extemporaneously from his open Bible.³⁵ His disregard for tradition was made worse by an evangelical emphasis on the necessity of an individual conversion experience and on the doctrine of assurance of salvation which contrasted with the OC understanding of salvation as the acceptance by God of a faithful community.³⁶ While it was customary for OC ministers to exhort people of the necessity of *bekjeare* (to be converted) it was commonly understood that matters of faith were private. If one's faith was genuine it would manifest itself in good works (i.e., conformity to OC traditions and distinct way of life). Moreover, to speak with certainty about one's salvation was confirmation of spiritual pride--claiming "assurance of salvation" was evidence of vain boasting.³⁷

Despite his departures from tradition, Wiebe was supported by many who intentionally attended the church in which he was scheduled to preach. The bishop, along with the other ministers, disapproved of Wiebe's innovations and saw his popularity as a threat to their collective authority. Wiebe subsequently discovered that he had been excluded from an important ministerial meeting. Matters came to a head on Saturday, 2 November 1974 when Bishop Julius Enns informed Wiebe by telephone that he had been suspended from preaching indefinitely until "things would improve."

The other families involved had additional reasons for leaving the OC church. All had favoured reforms in the church for some time, and were dissatisfied with Bishop Enns who

³³Other incongruities in the OC religious experience that often prompted a search for more meaningful religious alternatives included: the lack of a consistent morality among OC Mennonites despite a high level of religious activity; the lack of spiritual vitality despite successfully isolating themselves from the world; and the cultural accommodations permitted to enhance economic growth while adhering to the myth that a static body of beliefs and standards are being preserved.

³⁴Wiebe was ordained on 15 August 1970. He had been a *Vorsaenger* for more than six years prior to this (Interview with Jake Wiebe, Osler, May 1992).

³⁵The practice by ministers of reading sermons was initially established both as a strategy for guarding against heresy, and as a practical means for assisting those ministers who found it difficult to write their own sermons.

³⁶Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites*, 35. Salvation was the ultimate goal of OC community life. This understanding was rooted in their self-conception as God's chosen (and pure) people who had covenanted to remain faithful to God and to their *Jemeent* (church).

³⁷See Schlabach's discussion of the development of the humility motif among Mennonites in *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 29-32.

refused to call a general brotherhood meeting to discuss matters.³⁸ Others were concerned about the absence of programs for their children who were entering adolescence and were decidedly uninterested in church. Others wanted the Bible to be studied more openly.

On Sunday, 03 November 1974, twelve families gathered somewhat apprehensively in the home of Jake and Anne Wiebe in Martensville for a time of worship. With great emotion the group sang together, in English, a revivalist hymn (“We Have an Anchor”) which expressed the uncertainty felt by the participants. One week later, the same group, along with a few additional individuals, held a similar service in the home of Peter and Mary Guenther near Hepburn. By now it was clear that a major irreparable rift was taking place among the OC Mennonites in the region. For some, participating in these renegade services required considerable courage: choosing to take part meant fracturing familial loyalties and friendships which, in some cases, resulted in alienation from parents and siblings. A few dropped out at this point on account of the pressure exerted by family members. For most, however, the risks strengthened the solidarity among the participants.

Within two weeks the group had become sufficiently organized to rent a small hall in the town of Osler in which they continued to meet for worship until March 1976.³⁹ On 18 November 1974 a more formal brotherhood meeting was convened to further the process of organization. The group decided to call themselves the “Osler Mission Group,” which was later changed to Osler Mission Chapel (OMC).⁴⁰ Pressing decisions concerning the structure of Sunday morning worship services needed to be made. The choices marked an immediate and decisive departure from OC practices: segregated seating was abrogated;⁴¹ they generally concurred that services should be bilingual with English being the primary language; a list of ordained ministers from neighbouring evangelical churches who would be invited to preach was prepared; and arrangements were made to conduct a one-half hour Sunday School prior to the Sunday morning worship service. Former *Vorsaenger* were asked to lead congregational singing. Plans were also made to inaugurate a regular Bible study for adults, a church library, and a youth program for teens.⁴²

The influence of evangelicalism played an integral part in the creation of, and the

³⁸He had essentially become, according to Jake Wiebe, a dictator in church affairs (interview with Jake Wiebe, Osler, May 1992).

³⁹This decision was made at a meeting held on 11 November 1974 at the home of Henry and Marg Neufeld. In the fall of 1975, a local resident (Jacob H. Pauls, a former minister in the Osler General Conference Church) donated several acres of land in Osler on which the group built a new church. Even the architecture of the new building reflected a departure from OC tradition: unlike the plain OC church buildings the OMC facility included a basement with modern kitchen facilities and washrooms, carpeted floors, oak pews and communion table, and even a biblical motto etched on the front wall—initially this was the rather ominous warning, “Prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12), which was later changed to a gentler admonition, “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found” (Isaiah 55:6) (Minutes of Osler Mission Chapel Brotherhood [MOMCB], 16 December 1974; MOMCB, 9 June 76).

⁴⁰MOMCB, 2 October 1975. An organizational meeting held on 11 November 1974 did include women, but on account of some complaints, the group reverted back to the OC practice of brotherhood meetings.

⁴¹The rationale was pragmatic: “it [is] better for families to sit together, especially where little children [are] involved” (MOMCB, 18 November 1974).

⁴²The first meeting for young people was planned for 6 December 1974, and was organized by Henry Wiebe, Ruth Peters and Abram G. Janzen (MOMCB, 30 November 1974).

ongoing transformation within, OMC. In the remainder of the article I will examine how this group self-consciously looked towards and aligned itself with North American evangelical Protestantism by embracing a more rigorous biblicism to counter routinized OC traditions, and by prioritizing participation in missionary activity in contrast to the insularity and passivity of OC life. This will be followed by a look at how aspects of the OC Mennonite worldview--particularly its separationist approach towards culture--were sufficiently compatible with an ambivalence towards culture found within certain corners of evangelicalism to permit a relatively uncomplicated transition. Nevertheless, while many changes within OMC at the outset signalled a kind of emancipation for the group, other changes took longer as OC values and practices lingered. While the departure from the OC assisted one generation in endorsing and accepting aspects of Canadian culture against which the OC resistance had become intolerable, there were definite limits placed on this process. Tension ensued as a younger generation, and people from other traditions, either deliberately or inadvertently pushed the cultural frontiers further. Finally, I will trace the incremental changes in the church's administrative structure and its move towards a professionalised ministry as its polity gradually came to resemble other Protestant churches. The congregation faced some conflict as it struggled to develop its own organizational structure and to maintain a comfortable independence within the denominational structure of the CMC.

Back to the Bible

One of the central defining characteristics of evangelicalism is its devotion to the Bible.⁴³ The strong biblicism of evangelicalism was particularly appealing to the OMC group after struggling for years to reform a religious system that refused to permit the open study of the Bible. Permitting individuals to offer their interpretations of the Bible threatened to destroy the collective unity of the OC by challenging the validity of traditional practices and even the personal authority of the bishop. OC people generally assumed that their beliefs and practices, and the authority of their ministers, were based on the Bible. In actual practice, the Bible was seldom consulted and was an unfamiliar book to most. Interpretations rendered by ministers were considered authoritative and were not to be challenged by lay people.

An emphasis on the study of the Bible has been from the outset a central feature of OMC.⁴⁴ Within months of the schism, the OMC group inaugurated a mid-week Bible study and prayer meeting for adults as well as bi-weekly Bible study evenings for youth. While attendance was never made compulsory for members, an implicit attitude prevailed indicating the absolute priority that regular Bible study *should* have in the life of a Christian.⁴⁵

The influence of literature produced by organizations like Back to the Bible (which featured the voice of Theodore Epp, a member of the Conference of Mennonites in Nebraska), Radio Bible Class (founded in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1938 by M.R. DeHaan) and the personnel from transdenominational Bible schools who emphasized the "priesthood of all believers" encouraged the people of OMC to read the Bible for themselves. Diminishing the gulf between clergy and laity had a profoundly democratizing effect within the new congregation.

⁴³See Mark Noll and Nathan Hatch, eds., *The Bible in America* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982).

⁴⁴Although no attempt is made to defend the King James version as superior to others, it is nevertheless the preferred text (see Minutes of Osler Mission Chapel Administration Board [MOMCAB], 7 January 1982, for a resolution stating that all readings from the Bible in the pulpit should be done using the KJV. This policy is re-affirmed in 1990, MOMCAB, 3 September 1990).

⁴⁵See e.g., the concern expressed by members of the ministerial about lagging attendance at mid-week Bible study (MOMCB, 2 February 1984; MOMCB, 3 January 1985).

The freedom to offer their own views inspired a sense of confidence in challenging fossilized OC traditions and in forging their own religious destiny. Moreover, regular participation in Bible studies increased considerably the level of biblical literacy among older OMC members who never attended Bible schools.

Despite their consistent emphasis on the importance of studying the Bible and the verbal assent given to the belief that the Holy Spirit guides each individual “into all truth,” OMC leaders hesitated when younger members suggested the inauguration of home Bible studies. During the early 1980s many young couples and single adults became increasingly uninterested in attending the mid-week Bible study organized by the church. In part, this reflected the changing demographics within the congregation. Couples with young children found making weekly arrangements for child-care difficult and costly.⁴⁶ Single adults began expressing their frustration with the absence of a program designed to meet their specific needs.⁴⁷ Moreover, the large disparity in the age of the participants, and the format preferred by the older participants, inhibited some from taking part.⁴⁸ The idea of home Bible studies was strongly discouraged with the rationale that it would lead to theological disharmony and fragmentation within the church. As pressure mounted, OMC leaders responded by offering a series of Bible studies for young couples led by one of the ministers.⁴⁹ In 1985, some members again requested permission to organize home Bible studies. This time it was “allowed” on a trial basis with the caveat that these studies be supervised by the ministerial. The assumptions about the necessity of retaining clerical control to preserve theological uniformity were, ironically, reminiscent of OC attitudes that had once been resisted by the leaders of OMC. The sheer number of young couples, and the practical impossibility of having all potential groups supervised by the ministers, did gradually lead the Administration Board (hereafter AB) to relinquish control and to encourage lay people in such initiatives.⁵⁰

The people of OMC generally employ a simple “common-sense,” literal approach for interpreting the Bible. However, the general lack of awareness of how culturally determined biases operate within the hermeneutical process resulted in the preservation of certain practices derived from their OC background that would not be endorsed as biblical by most evangelical Protestants. A case in point is the way in which women are not only considered ineligible for leadership positions (a view shared by many evangelicals) but also excluded from participating in the decision-making process at the congregational level.⁵¹ The fact that the CMC constitution

⁴⁶Efforts were eventually made to accommodate this concern: various teens were asked to provide a baby-sitting service (MOMCAB, 7 March 1985; MOMCAB, 4 April 1985).

⁴⁷See Ken Guenther, “Proposal on OMC College and Career Group,” May 1983.

⁴⁸For years the format remained constant: members sat in pews while a leader led the study from the front of the church. A variety of new ideas were discussed in 1981, but no changes resulted (Minutes of OMC Brotherhood [MOMCB], 3 September 1981). It was not until 1983 that the Administration Board decided that the mid-week group should sit in a semi-circle to encourage participation (Minutes of OMC Administration Board/Missions Board [MOMCAB/MB] 7 February 1983).

⁴⁹MOMCB, 3 September 1981.

⁵⁰MOMCAB, 1 October 1987; MOMCAB, 24 October 1989; MOMCAB, 1 October 1992.

⁵¹The CMC Constitution does not restrict the participation of women at brotherhood meetings. In fact several CMC churches in Manitoba permit the practice.

does not restrict the participation of women at brotherhood meetings and that OMC leaders were unwilling to provide a “biblical” defense for the policy indicates that OC cultural values still do at times determine the construction of church policies. Naivety about the interpretative process also resulted in some careless appeals to the Bible to discourage activities like the use of puppets and drama, and to heighten the legitimacy and status of views that are based more on personal tastes and cultural preferences than on a credible reading of the biblical texts.⁵²

Osler “Mission” Chapel

Also characteristic of evangelicalism is its impulse towards activism. Outlets for this energy have historically taken the form of various philanthropic efforts, political crusades, and particularly evangelistic and missionary endeavours.⁵³ The OMC group signalled from the outset its endorsement of “missions” by intentionally including the term in their name. Towards this end, a “Missions Board” was formed in the fall of 1976.⁵⁴ Faithful to its stated intention, OMC has put an enormous amount of its energy and resources towards the support of missionary work in Canada and around the world. At least 50-65% of its annual budget has consistently been designated towards an impressive list of individual missionaries and mission agencies.

In addition to being an outlet for their evangelistic zeal, the emphasis on missions served as a catalyst that legitimized and accelerated change.⁵⁵ From the outset missionaries were regularly invited to speak and present their work. In addition to observing such services in other evangelical churches in the area, such meetings were an extension of a practice initiated prior to the advent of OMC by a community Ladies Aid group that included a number of the women who were later involved in OMC.⁵⁶ Initially, the OMC group sought out Mennonite missionaries with

⁵²At a brotherhood meeting in early 1985 discussion centred around the question, “Should we allow our women to wear earrings or not?” (MOMCB, 3 January 1985). Some wanted the offending women to resign their positions as Sunday School teachers: others argued that there was no biblical justification for disallowing earrings. The ensuing stalemate over what the Bible actually taught confronted members with the realization that biblical interpretations are not self-evident and that differences of opinion would have to be resolved some other way.

⁵³Gerald Ediger has recently demonstrated how the priority of missions was a significant force in precipitating a change from the use of German to English among the Mennonite Brethren in Canada. In this way it served as a catalyst for acculturation within this denomination (“Ethnicity and Religion among Mennonite Brethren, 1940-1970: Language as a factor of changing religious identity and practice in an immigrant church,” Th.D. Diss., Toronto School of Theology, Emmanuel College, 1993).

⁵⁴Minutes of Osler Mission Chapel Missions Board (MOMCMB), 10 November 1976.

⁵⁵The incentive for missions at OMC was never as closely linked to an urgent premillennial eschatology as in some other corners of evangelicalism (see Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1925* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979], 67; and Dana L. Roberts, “The Crisis of Missions’: Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions,” in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 29-46). Despite the fact that the CMC Statement of Faith is neither explicitly premillennial nor does it mention inerrancy, both doctrines were accepted by members of OMC as part of the evangelical package with which they were acquainted—both doctrines were taught at all the transdenominational Bible schools they supported.

⁵⁶In 1967 a transdenominational group of women known as the Embury Ladies Aid began to meet regularly to make items for mission organizations, and to organize mission fund-raising and information nights in local farm quonsets and school gymnasiums. In addition to being an important social outlet, this group indirectly served as a catalyst for change among the OC. On one occasion just prior to the inauguration of OMC, Jake Wiebe was invited to speak at a missions night organized by this group of women. His public participation sparked a serious row within the OC ministerial.

whom they were personally acquainted (e.g., George Loewen with Shantymen, Dave and Evonne Ginther with Overseas Missionary Fellowship, Vangie Guenter with Regions Beyond Missionary Union, Agatha Doerksen and Jake and Junko Friesen with TEAM, Jake and Dorothy Fehr with Gospel Missionary Union, et al.). However, contact with non-denominational mission agencies soon led them beyond their ethnic boundaries.⁵⁷ Frequently visiting missionaries wished to use slides to enhance their presentation. During their first year in the rented hall in Osler, this was not considered a problem. However, upon joining the CMC, the bishop, Henry K. Schellenberg, explicitly cautioned against the use of “musical instruments, films and slides.”⁵⁸ This admonition, together with the deeply-rooted reverence and awe given to a place of worship within the OC tradition, and the suspicion of the medium on the part of some as worldly, culminated in a resolution that slides not be shown in the OMC church sanctuary.⁵⁹ Missionary presentations utilizing slides were therefore permitted only in the church basement. However, within four years this resolution was challenged. The construction of classrooms and poor ventilation made basement meetings unbearably crowded and uncomfortable. After several deferrals, the decision banning slides from the sanctuary was unanimously reversed by the brotherhood in September 1980.⁶⁰ The priority of missions took precedence over retaining customs once held sacred.

The interest and commitment to missions is an important factor behind OMC’s new openness towards post-secondary education particularly certain transdenominational Bible schools. The church early on adopted a policy of assisting students attending Bible schools with their tuition to encourage attendance.⁶¹ First year students receive a 10% reimbursement, second year students receive 15%, and third year students receive 20%.⁶² In 1990 the OMC Missions Board began subsidizing the cost of attending the annual youth retreats organized by various Bible schools and colleges to encourage high school students to attend.⁶³

⁵⁷Many within OMC felt that extending an invitation to a missionary to do a presentation implied a responsibility to provide some level of financial support. As a result, the OMC group soon supported an impressive list of mission agencies and individuals. This was made possible by the fact that, until 1990 none of the pastoral staff was paid a salary by the church. It is interesting to note the growing apprehension at Mission Board meetings of the possible consequences on the level of financial support for different individuals and mission agencies should pastoral staff begin receiving financial remuneration (see MOMCMB, 26 October 1989; MOMCMB, 28 December 1989; and MOMCMB, 25 June 1991).

⁵⁸MOMCB, 28 July 1978.

⁵⁹MOMCB, 14 October 1975.

⁶⁰The matter was first raised in 1979 (MOMCB, 5 April 1979), and somewhat more vigorously again in the fall of 1980. By this time a definite openness to reversing the decision is evident, but with the caveat that “the brethren who had voted to retain showing of slides downstairs would be willing to change their positions” (MOMCAB, 4 September 1980).

⁶¹MOMCAB, 7 April 1977.

⁶²Several caveats were added specifying that the school must be “approved by the church,” that remuneration be based upon the tuition rates charged by Millar Memorial Bible Institute, and that students not be assisted for more than five years (MOMCMB, 7 December 1978; MOMCAB, 1 April 1981; MOMCAB, 7 May 1981; MOMCMB, 6 May 1982).

⁶³MOMCMB, 25 January 1990.

Shortly after the organization of OMC members who could afford to do so began participating in travel tours organized by mission agencies to places like Haiti and Bolivia. This was, for those involved, their first experience in international travel and was explicitly legitimated by its connection to “missions.” Requests to report publicly concerning these “exotic” adventures enhanced one’s social status within the church community.⁶⁴ As the children of the original group of OMC members grew older, many of them participated in short-term missions projects or are working as career missionaries in various countries.⁶⁵ More recently, members have travelled extensively either to visit their children stationed overseas or to participate in short-term work projects.⁶⁶ This exposure to diverse cultures, to different practices within evangelicalism, and to more leisure-oriented lifestyles, encouraged the process of acculturation within OMC. Although travel to locations for the primary purpose of leisure and relaxation is still seen by some members as suspiciously “secular,” many no longer share this inhibition.

The evangelical mandate to fulfil the “Great Commission” along with the emphasis on a spiritual unity that transcends all differences under which ethnic and theological distinctives must be subsumed created a certain dissonance within the group. The omission of “Mennonite” in the name “Osler Mission Chapel” was intended to minimize the importance of an ethnic “Mennonitism” and highlight their apparent inclusiveness and evangelistic intentions. Suggestions by CMC leaders that OMC highlight Mennonite distinctives like nonresistance are ignored and considered unimportant over against the greater task of evangelism. Despite efforts to subordinate their Mennonite ethnicity to their priority on missions and outreach, this congregation has attracted very few people who are not ethnic Mennonites even though demographic changes in the district indicate an influx of non-Mennonite people. Numerical increases in the size of the congregation have largely (but not entirely) been gained from biological growth, and by attracting people from one of the more traditional Mennonite churches (either OC or Bergthaler). Despite denials on the part of its leaders Mennonite ethnicity remains an integral, but unacknowledged, factor in the congregational life of OMC. This is implicitly acknowledged by discussions of their niche within the local Christian community. While leaders in OMC readily endorse the notion that the “Great Commission” is a global mandate to communicate the gospel to every culture their local emphasis remains narrowly focused on, in their words, “reaching these [OC and Bergthaler] people.” On the one hand, this rationale does reflect a sensible pragmatism regarding the cultural realities within OMC; on the other hand, it was used to legitimize resistance to cultural changes within the church. Ironically, it is only in the last five years--after many of the cultural changes once resisted had already been implemented--that additional OC Mennonites have begun attending OMC. One suspects, therefore, that the rationale was perhaps an indication of the general unwillingness on the part of OMC to move beyond its cultural comfort zone than it was of any concerted effort to evangelize OC Mennonites in the area.⁶⁷

⁶⁴See e.g., MOMCMB, 1 February 1978.

⁶⁵Short-term ventures to countries other than Canada were sometimes discouraged by the OMC Missions Board on account of the cost. They argued that experience could, more economically, be gained by participating in various summer ministries in Canada.

⁶⁶See e.g., MOMCMB, 26 April 1990; MOMCMB, 26 November 1992.

⁶⁷There remains a significant gap between the beliefs and practices held by OMC missionaries working in cross-

“Be Ye Separate”

A long history of persecution, and deliberate geographic and cultural isolation on the part of OC Mennonites, gave them a special affinity for the evangelical motif of “being in the world” but not “of the world” which was supported by the biblical mandate to “come out from among them and be ye separate” (2 Cor. 6:17). Years of persecution initially forced Anabaptists to live in segregated enclaves. This led many Mennonite groups to believe that the “world” was essentially wicked, and that life is a brief (unpleasant) sojourn with a reward elsewhere. Over time, these enclaves nurtured a deliberate insularity from surrounding cultures; Mennonite groups like the OC came to prefer the geographical separation that allowed them to preserve their distinct language, faith and ethnic identity. A “static dualistic nature of reality” emerged: there is a kingdom of God and a kingdom of this world, and one ought not to encourage any intercourse or communication between these worlds.⁶⁸

A similar dualistic ambivalence towards culture is present within certain corners of North American evangelicalism.⁶⁹ This came about during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as evangelicalism, the dominant religious ideology in America at the time, saw its influence rapidly wane. In response to forces it could no longer control, evangelicals became defensive and retreated from the cultural and intellectual mainstream. Despite vigorous attempts to defend “fundamental doctrines”--hence the term fundamentalism--evangelicals became a beleaguered minority. The rise of dispensational premillennialism, which helped evangelicals depict themselves as a holy remnant, further accentuated a cultural pessimism and withdrawal.⁷⁰ Although some evangelicals looked for opportunities to bring America back to its “Christian” heritage, other evangelicals essentially made separatism an article of faith. As a result, evangelicals built a vast subculture from which many did not emerge until mid-century. Sometimes called “neo-evangelicals,” those desirous of re-entering the cultural mainstream nevertheless continued to feel the influence of separatistic tendencies cultivated earlier.⁷¹

cultural contexts, and those held by CMC leaders. No attempt has been made to harmonize these (Ken Guenther to the author, 22 July 1994).

⁶⁸Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites*, 228.

⁶⁹Leo Driedger describes the similarities between ideological (as in the case of fundamentalists) and sociological (as in the case of ethnic communities) subsystems that have been developed to isolate individuals or groups (“Dualist and Wholist Views of God and the World,” in *Mennonite Identity in Conflict* [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988], 152).

⁷⁰The ambivalence towards culture among evangelicals is a major theme within George Marsden’s *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980). The growing ambivalence towards culture among evangelicals is a major theme within this work. Scholars often use H. Richard Niebuhr’s familiar typologies of “Christ against culture” or “Christ and culture in paradox” to describe the attitude towards culture displayed by evangelicals during the first half of the twentieth century (see e.g., Martin E. Marty, “Tensions within Contemporary Evangelicalism,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They are Changing*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975], 183).

⁷¹In *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* George Marsden discusses the dilemmas created by a tradition of separatism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 6-7. See also Richard Quebedeaux’s book about evangelicals emerging from an “anticultural ghetto” (*The Worldly Evangelicals* [New York: Harper & Row, 1978]), and Bruce Shelley’s discussion of the “cultural isolationism” of North American evangelicalism in *Evangelicalism in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 112. Other helpful studies of evangelicalism include Donald G. Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); George M. Marsden, ed., *Evangelicalism and Modern America, 1930-1980* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Donald W. Dayton and Robert K.

Although the influence of a militant and separatistic fundamentalism is not as pronounced in Canada as in the United States, John Stackhouse discerns a similar “sectish” *mentalité* within Canadian evangelicalism that manifests a suspicion or hostility towards “modern” ideas.⁷² Many of his observations about the “sectish” *mentalité* of Prairie Bible Institute are equally applicable to the transdenominational Bible schools influential among the people of OMC.

This more separatistic kind of evangelicalism furnished OMC with both a theological framework (i.e., an emphasis on conversion, biblicism, missions) and an environment in which certain aspects of Canadian culture could safely be accepted: it provided a natural compatibility and modeled for the people of OMC an ambivalence towards culture that was similar to the suspicion of “the world” that had served as the integrative principle within OC theology and culture. The fear of being “of the world” was a motif used by OMC leaders and defended as the “biblical” foundation for drawing their own cultural and moral boundaries in the unfamiliar territory of Canadian culture. Tracing the way these boundaries were modified within the OMC community over time reveals how leaders utilized this motif to control and guide the pace of acculturation.

Having set in motion the process of change in the fall of 1974 the innovations within OMC continued. A standard pattern became evident: aspects of previously disallowed practices are quickly endorsed creating an immediate sense of emancipation and “progress.” At the same time, a certain resistance, an innate fear and suspicion of worldliness, kept some OC customs and attitudes intact and other commonly accepted practices within Protestantism from being fully accepted. However, many of these practices have gradually been permitted as the desire for, and in some cases the pressure for, a greater degree of acculturation intensified.

(1) The most visible forum within which change can be observed is in the structure and format of worship services. These gradually came to resemble those offered by neighbouring evangelical Protestant churches. In addition to an immediate switch to the use of English, extemporaneous public prayers were introduced augmenting the OC custom of having the entire congregation kneel for silent prayer. Within two years, the group decided to appoint several “ushers.”⁷³ Shortly after this decision “offerings” were incorporated as part of the worship service--in the OC church members deposited financial offerings in a box hung on the back wall of the church.⁷⁴ In 1977 church bulletins were approved for use on an experimental basis.⁷⁵ Obvious also was the growing level of participation by lay people during services: in a conscious attempt to diminish the gap between clergy and laity, male members were able, almost from the outset, to lead in “prayer and scripture reading” during services, a practice that had never been permitted in the OC church. By 1980, lay people (male) were permitted to preach.⁷⁶

Changes in the music used during services provide some significant examples of the

Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷² *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to its Character* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993), 189-204.

⁷³ MOMCAB, 4 November 1976.

⁷⁴ MOMCB, 2 December 1976.

⁷⁵ MOMCAB, 3 March 1977.

⁷⁶ MOMCB, 20 January 1975; the absence of both pastors who were attending a ministerial retreat resulted in an invitation to preach being extended to two lay people (MOMCAB, 6 March 1980).

simultaneous dynamic of acceptance and resistance. Immediately after leaving the OC church, the new group began using English hymnals with standard musical notation that were being discarded by the Hepburn Gospel Church (EMMC). Although the OC *Gesangbuch* was still used occasionally during the first year, people quickly came to prefer the tunes and faster tempo of gospel songs that spoke more directly about the Christian's personal experience than did the hymns of the *Gesangbuch*.⁷⁷ In the fall of 1976, a music teacher from Bethany Bible Institute, a Mennonite Brethren school located in Hepburn, was asked to teach interested individuals how to sing harmonies in order to enhance congregational singing.⁷⁸ During the winter of 1978 it was suggested that a member of OMC be trained to conduct, "thereby eliminating the need for having an instructor come to teach our young people."⁷⁹ The youth of the church were also encouraged to form choirs both as a means for learning how to sing as well as for participating in church services.⁸⁰ Depending on whether the expertise was readily available--usually an adult who had acquired some conducting skills at Bible school--adult choirs were frequently organized during the 1980s.⁸¹

Within several months of their genesis, the question of musical instruments for accompaniment was raised; it was generally agreed that it should be permitted "as long as this was done with moderation."⁸² Initially this did not include congregational singing during Sunday worship services: a small electric portable organ, which was the only instrument in use (and only one person was able to play it), was used during mid-week Bible studies, and to accompany an occasional small group during evening services. However, shortly after the completion of OMC's first building project in 1976, the matter of purchasing a church organ was raised. After deferring a decision several times, in October 1976 it was finally decided to install an organ for a six-month experimental period (75% of the brotherhood favoured this change).⁸³ Once installed there was never any question about again prohibiting its use; in fact, obtaining approval for the acquisition of a piano quickly became the next objective. This quest was successful in 1980.⁸⁴

Leaders wrestled also with the question of where song leaders should sit during a worship

⁷⁷In October 1976, it was unanimously agreed to replace the seldom-used *Gesangbuch* with another German hymnal with notes (MOMCB, 7 October 1976). Had it not been for the influence of the CMC leaders it is unlikely that any German hymnal would have been purchased at all. The CMC leaders also recommended their own *CMC Sunday School Song Book* (Steinbach: Board of Christian Education, Chortizer Mennonite Conference, n.d.), which contained a mixture of German and English hymns and was used for a time at OMC. Eventually OMC decided on the exclusive use of *Great Hymns of the Faith*, comp. John W. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1968).

⁷⁸MOMCAB, 4 November 1976.

⁷⁹MOMCB, 2 March 1978.

⁸⁰MOMCAB, n.d., November 1977.

⁸¹See e.g., MOMCAB, 5 January 1984; MOMCAB, 2 May 1985; MOMCAB, 8 December 1987.

⁸²The minutes do not indicate what was meant by moderation (MOMCB, 20 January 1975).

⁸³MOMCB, 9 June 1976; MOMCAB, 2 September 1976; MOMCB, 7 October 1976; MOMCB, 6 May 1977. Finding capable organists continued to be a problem for several years. The use of any other instruments within the church remained prohibited (see e.g., a request by the Ben Goertzen family which was denied on account of "the group's various instruments and amplifiers" [MOMCAB, 1 February 1978]).

⁸⁴MOMCAB, 6 March 1980; and MOMCB, 1 May 1980.

service. According to OC customs, the proper place was next to the pulpit facing the congregation. Those chosen as song leaders in OMC preferred instead to sit with their families among the congregation. However, the weight of tradition made this relatively innocuous request a matter that first had to be discussed with the bishop before receiving formal approval by the brotherhood in 1980.⁸⁵

By the mid-1980s the “liturgy” of OMC had been determined. Having established its own conventions changes in the format were difficult to achieve. Subsequent innovations frequently becoming a battleground between older and younger members of the congregation.⁸⁶ Persistent requests did eventually result in greater flexibility in the format of services and to the acceptance of a variety of new practices.⁸⁷ For example, during the summer of 1987, “clapping during the singing of choruses” was deemed acceptable by the brotherhood.⁸⁸ Although song leaders occasionally substituted more contemporary “choruses” for traditional hymns, in 1989 a time was specifically designated for singing “choruses.”⁸⁹ The acceptance of a more contemporary style of music was accompanied by pressure to use additional instruments. By 1991, even drums, which once were considered incommensurable with “Christian” music, were in use.⁹⁰

(2) The same pattern of acceptance and reticence was displayed in the practices that were either forbidden or permitted within the church facility. The church, particularly the “sanctuary,” was considered “the house of God,” a hallowed place in which all activities should be respectfully subdued.⁹¹ Noted above was the manner in which slide presentations were gradually sanctioned. But the approval of slides proved to be merely the proverbial thin edge of the wedge of what would eventually be permitted within the church building--as partially illustrated by the acceptance of various musical instruments. From the outset, OMC decided that it was not appropriate even “to advertise films in church” despite the fact that many OMC young people were active participants in a Saturday-night ministry in Rosthern called “Truth for Youth” at which Christian films were shown. Less than two years after this policy was re-affirmed in 1981,⁹² a young people’s group successfully invited parents and families to the showing of a film in the church. In 1983, youth leaders previewed several Billy Graham Association films, and a

⁸⁵MOMCAB, 11 October 1979; MOMCB, 1 May 1980.

⁸⁶A simple change like replacing a congregational hymn during the offering with either an organlude or a song by a small group becomes a significant agenda item at a brotherhood meeting (MOMCB, 5 October 1982; MOMCAB, 2 November 1982).

⁸⁷A variety of suggestions for varying the format of Sunday morning worship services--shorter announcements, occasional variations in the order of service, better use of music--were presented by Joe Guenther (MOMCAB, 6 August 1987).

⁸⁸MOMCAB, 2 April 1987; MOMCB, 15 June 1987.

⁸⁹MOMCAB, 2 May 1989.

⁹⁰MOMCAB, 14 February 1991. It is significant to note that this decision did not require a formal vote by the brotherhood.

⁹¹This veneration was to be displayed in other ways as well: note e.g., the dress codes for youth that stipulated dresses for girls and no blue jeans for boys (MOMCAB, 2 March 1989).

⁹²MOMCAB, 15 October 1981. Although the Administration Board Minutes indicate that this is a re-affirmation of an existing policy, there is no mention in any church documents of such a prior decision.

screen and a projector were subsequently purchased by the church.⁹³ By the summer of 1985, the leadership of OMC was planning to present a James Dobson “Focus on the Family” film series.⁹⁴ These were shown in the main sanctuary with alternative activities for children in the basement. In part, this transformation was the result of an announcement in 1983 that the ministry in Rosthern would be discontinued, and the sense by the AB and Missions Board that it might be possible to organize a similar ministry in Osler.⁹⁵ The designation of this proposal as an “outreach ministry” is not accidental; this nomenclature helped members of OMC to overcome their opposition to films--an aversion that was based on a kind of guilt by association with “secular” movies--and to legitimize the activity as something that could also take place within the church.⁹⁶

Somewhat more tempestuous was the struggle to obtain permission for using puppets and for staging drama productions within the church. Because several members of OMC had been involved in drama teams at Bible school, a suggestion was made in 1980 that a drama “outreach” program be developed among the youth. Although the idea received narrow approval from the AB, a final decision at a subsequent brotherhood meeting was postponed. The question was eventually withdrawn by the leaders of the youth group on account of the opposition received.⁹⁷ The matter of puppets was precipitated by practices routinely used by several Bible schools during their presentations in local churches. In 1982, the AB decided to inform the Bible schools which occasionally visited OMC that any presentations must “be restricted to our church’s position on skits or puppets.”⁹⁸ Both issues re-surfaced several times during the 1980s, but culminated at a brotherhood meeting in 1989.⁹⁹ Arguing in favour was Henry Neufeld who pointed towards the way an understanding of certain subjects could be enhanced by using such a medium. At the request of the AB and ministerial who thought that the brotherhood should hear the rationale that lay behind its previous decisions on the matter, Cornie Guenther agreed, albeit with considerable ambivalence, to represent the opposite viewpoint. He began by observing that some consider the use of drama to contravene the “biblical principle [of] reverence for the

⁹³MOMCAB, 17 October 1983; MOMCAB, 8 December 1983; MOMCAB, 7 February 1983; MOMCAB, 12 April 1983; MOMCAB, 5 April 1984.

⁹⁴MOMCAB, 4 July 1985; MOMCAB, 1 August 1985.

⁹⁵Although the initiative for starting such a ministry in Osler came from OMC, it quickly became an inter-church operation (MOMCAB, 9 February 1984; MOMCAB, 7 June 1984). At first the Osler School Auditorium was used but in an attempt to reduce costs the venue was later moved to the Osler Community Church (MOMCAB, 28 October 1993).

⁹⁶The film series shown within the church are repeatedly referred to a “film ministry” (MOMCAB, 1 December 1988).

⁹⁷MOMCAB, 5 November 1980; MOMCAB, 3 December 1980; MOMCB, 8 January 1981; MOMCAB, 11 February 1981. The beauty of the congregational system of church government is that it solicits input and permits participation on the part of all members. However, as this case (and many others) illustrates, the desire to obtain a consensus routinely meant that decisions within OMC were reduced to the most traditional common denominator.

⁹⁸MOMCAB, 1 April 1982 (there is no prior statement describing the policy of the OMC concerning puppets).

⁹⁹Requests to use puppets during revival meetings (MOMCAB, 5 February 1987), and in Sunday School are both denied (MOMCAB, 6 April 1989). A request by the youth to do an Easter drama is deferred to a brotherhood meeting (MOMCAB, 5 January 1989).

church sanctuary because it has been dedicated to the Lord.” Further, he intimated that Neufeld’s utilitarian argument was untenable because the actions by Christians should not be determined by using the unbiblical principle of the “end justifies the means.” Finally, he suggested that permitting drama productions in the church “could be a stumbling block.”¹⁰⁰ Both made ample use of the Bible to defend their position: the motion to permit the use of drama and puppets was defeated by a single vote. The matter was nevertheless re-introduced at a brotherhood meeting two years later, and this time drama was approved--with the familiar caveat that they be screened and approved by the ministerial--but the use of puppets remains forbidden.¹⁰¹ Since this time, several groups have presented dramas without any of the deleterious consequences anticipated by some.

Significant also were the constantly changing judgements concerning who could use the church facility, and what customs would be permitted or forbidden at weddings. Initially, the church facility was only to be used for weddings in instances where both individuals were members of OMC. In part, this policy was designed to encourage youth to become baptised members of the church prior to marriage.¹⁰² However, it quickly became unworkable as young people from OMC met individuals from different church traditions (often at Bible school) who did not share the same preferences OMC leaders had retained from their OC past. As a result requests were soon heard from young couples who wanted to get married but who did not necessarily want to commit themselves to church membership at OMC.¹⁰³ In early 1982, a member whose partner belonged to another Mennonite church requested use of the church basement for a wedding reception. This request was denied.¹⁰⁴ Three years later, this restrictive policy was revoked by the AB, despite the fact that the policy had been reviewed and re-affirmed at a brotherhood meeting only six months prior.¹⁰⁵ In 1989, a request from a member’s daughter

¹⁰⁰MOMCB, 24 October 1989. The first two arguments assume the premise that drama, as an activity, is inherently problematic and perhaps even sinful. The third argument illustrates the systemic misuse by some evangelicals of the “stumbling block” passages (Romans 14:1-15:13; 1 Cor. 8-10) to insure conformity to certain practices or codes of behaviour.

¹⁰¹MOMCB, 12 November 1991. A related question was discussed concerning whether it is “permissible to use a live baby to portray the baby Jesus in a drama.” The AB ruled that this “would be acceptable but to use caution when an older person portrays Christ, such as the person to be a believer, and the words used would be words that Jesus used recorded in the Scriptures.” It also ruled that a Christmas tree would be permitted in the church sanctuary but only as part of the drama (MOMCAB, 12 November 1992).

¹⁰²Marriage and baptism continues to be linked in the minds of OMC leaders: in 1990 Ruth Goertzen was engaged to Jeff Stone (non-member) who had been baptized as an infant. Permission to have their wedding in OMC was denied because of the prospective groom’s refusal to consider being re-baptized. This is odd because nowhere in OMC or in CMC literature is baptism specified as a pre-requisite for marriage.

¹⁰³In 1980 Laurna [Wiebe] Schmidt’s membership was abruptly terminated on account of marrying a non-member (MOMCAB, 6 March 1980).

¹⁰⁴MOMCB, 11 March 1982.

¹⁰⁵MOMCAB, 5 February 1985; see also MOMCB, 26 June 1984. The caveat that the couple “abide by church regulations” accompanied the decision (these “regulations” are not outlined in any church documents). The reversal of policy in this instance highlights both the ambiguity of jurisdiction and accountability of the ministerial and AB to the brotherhood, and the manner in which the pressure for change tended to become more acute when children of the ministerial were involved.

who had not herself become a church member to use the facility pushed the AB towards yet another modification.¹⁰⁶ More recently, weddings have been conducted by OMC ministers in which the two partners were neither members nor had they had any close association with the church. Although not everyone agreed with the practice, it was justified as an “outreach” to specific families in the community.¹⁰⁷ Similar arguments are being made in current discussions about whether OMC ministers should officiate at weddings involving individuals who have been divorced.

Accompanying the disputes defining who should be allowed to use the facility were disagreements over what customs would be permitted at weddings. The first weddings held at OMC signalled a decisive shift away from OC customs: the brides wore white dresses, processions for the wedding party were permitted, programs to entertain guests were organized at receptions, and couples usually included one pair of attendants in their wedding party. However, in the summer of 1980, a wedding of the son of a minister was performed at which two pair of attendants were permitted despite the fact that another member had been discouraged from doing the same earlier that year. The practice of having two pair was formally enshrined as church policy in 1986 in response to a request by several couples for still more attendants.¹⁰⁸ But this did not deter people for long: eventually some weddings with three pair of attendants were permitted to take place in the early 1990s while other requests for the same continued to be denied. Eventually a request for four pair followed. The lack of consistency in adhering to what had become church policy brought the matter to a head at an AB meeting in early 1994. However, without a consensus no decision was made thereby leaving the church without any formal policy on the matter.¹⁰⁹ Other practices such as the use of candles, toasts to the bride, the role of photographers, and the tossing of bouquets and garters, sparked additional debates over what could be considered “proper” at a Christian wedding.¹¹⁰ OMC leaders repeatedly stressed that modern fashions and trends were not to be the standard for “Christian” weddings, but convincing the entire church community to adhere to one “standard” proved to be a difficult, and an elusive, pursuit.

(3) A third way in which the dualistic dynamic can be seen at work within OMC is in their understanding of Christian piety. OC Mennonites and many evangelical Protestants shared a preference for “practical,” rather than dogmatic or philosophical, approaches to theology.¹¹¹ In

¹⁰⁶The individual had simply assumed that the facility could be used and had made plans accordingly. This put OMC leaders in a difficult position (MOMCAB, 7 December 1989; MOMCAB, 1 February 1990). Again, the decision is accompanied by the ubiquitous caveat specifying that they “abide by the church regulations.”

¹⁰⁷See e.g., MOMCAB, 2 January 1992; MOMCAB, 7 August 1993. Some observed how neighbouring churches were able to attract unchurched young couples by adopting such a practice.

¹⁰⁸MOMCAB, 11 December 1986.

¹⁰⁹MOMCAB, 6 January 1994.

¹¹⁰MOMCAB, 7 March 1985; MOMCAB, 6 August 1987. Additional irritants prompted the ministerial to demand specific guidelines for the behaviour of photographers (MOMCAB, 3 May 1985) and for wedding receptions (MOMCAB, 3 May 1990). These guidelines were not included in the minutes.

¹¹¹This is true despite the fact that evangelicals have placed greater importance on the necessity of creeds than did most Mennonite traditions. The emphasis on creeds among evangelicals is dissipated somewhat by their preoccupation with communicating the “gospel.” This focus resulted in the popularizing of creedal formulations in some rather simplistic forms (e.g., Bill Bright, “The Four Spiritual Laws” [Campus Crusade for Christ, 1965]). Moreover, on

common also was an assumption that religious commitments will have a direct effect on the behaviour of those within the community of faith. The piety of both groups was defined by fairly rigid codes of conduct that measured conformity and confirmed an acceptable degree of separateness from the world: for the OC Mennonites this was understood in a more communal sense in that it verified their distinctiveness; for evangelical Protestants it defined the ethical behaviour, i.e., “holiness,” expected of each individual. This resulted in substantial differences in what the two groups classified as acceptable and unacceptable practices. Although OMC leaders retained intact for some time their compunction about certain activities, many OC prohibitions (e.g., against wearing neckties, visiting other churches, and using musical instruments) were exchanged for the evangelical taboos against the “bar-room” vices of drinking, smoking, gambling and attendance at theatres.¹¹²

The obsession with external conformity has had some ambivalent repercussions within OMC. First, it has created a degree of theological confusion by obfuscating the differences between biblical and cultural issues: practices that were once denounced and prohibited as “unbiblical” would gradually (sometimes suddenly) become permissible.¹¹³ If the Bible had not changed during the interim, what had? And if one, previously designated unbiblical, practice could be permitted, what else should remain forbidden? In addition to consuming considerable amounts of administrative time and energy, the ongoing defense of inconsequential customs tended to trivialize pronouncements made by church leaders on more important matters. Although some individuals interviewed pointed towards such inconsistencies as examples of blatant hypocrisy, it is better explained as an example of the way in which the motif of being “in the world but not of the world” was being employed to control the pace of acculturation.

Second, much more ironic has been the failure to recognize that emphasizing conformity to a specific code of personal conduct will not protect people from the more insidious manifestations of “worldliness” within Canadian culture (or, one might add, within North American evangelicalism). Most OMC members have avoided the demon of alcohol--private interviews would suggest that a few members engage in what is called “social drinking”--but they have not escaped the snares of middle-class materialism, or remained immune from the

account of the perceived urgency of the evangelistic mandate, many Bible school curriculums prioritized personal “spiritual maturity” and a “practical” training over a more scholarly approach to the Bible and theology (see Virginia L. Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990], 87-126, and Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism*, 71-88).

¹¹²For example, it was not until 1983, almost ten years after the origin of OMC, that Cornie Guenther decided that he would wear a necktie. Other changes took place much more rapidly: some individuals who would on occasion drink an alcoholic beverages as members of the OC church, quickly became strict teetotallers after joining OMC. OMC leaders condemned all forms of “drinking” as immoral. Some even argued, at least for a time, that whatever it was that Jesus transformed at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1-11), it could not have been an alcoholic beverage. This attitude towards the evils of alcohol was also the driving force behind a proposal to denominational leaders for exchanging communion wine with grape juice (MOMCB, 4 October 1979).

¹¹³One example is the way in which OMC has throughout most of its history discouraged participation in organized sports (members are forbidden to play sports on Sunday, MOMCB, 7 September 1978; a young people's request to form a hockey team is denied on the grounds that it would not “glorify God,” MOMCB, 31 October 1979; concern is expressed about the way sports could potentially interfere with church programs, MOMCAB, 3 May 1984, and MOMCB, 3 January 1985). However, in 1992 the AB approved a request to sponsor a basketball team (MOMCAB, 4 June 1992; MOMCAB, 2 July 1992). Members were occasionally cautioned about obsessions with individualized recreational pursuits like hunting and fishing which preoccupy the leisure time of some OMC members; but notions regarding the sacredness of Sunday as a day of rest and worship, and the pragmatic concern about conflicts with church events lay behind the more severe censure of organized sports.

appeal of individualism and its emphasis on personal autonomy. The gradual acceptance by the younger generation of contemporary fashions, recreational pursuits, and modern forms of entertainment, as well as their refusal to give authority figures the same deference as had previous generations, led to the ongoing demand for the acceptance of still other practices. Church leaders were repeatedly drawn into a never-ending (and often rather arbitrary) process of redrawing the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable practices. The preoccupation with observable behaviour diverted attention away from analysing the more sinister impact of the values that mitigated against their more communitarian Anabaptist traditions and that were being uncritically absorbed in the process of acculturation.

Third, stressing compliance with external behaviour as the primary means of defining Christian “faithfulness,” makes it unnecessary to nurture a sense of Christian vocation in which ALL Christians, and not just ministers and missionaries, are responsible for playing a part in permeating and influencing society. Although OMC does emphasize “outreach” and “witnessing” it has generally been perceived as one more isolated item on a list of required Christian activities, and not as a part of a larger more integrated vision of responsibility for transforming all aspects of society.¹¹⁴ Despite the preoccupation with personal conduct which legitimized a passivity towards involvement in all aspects of society, there are indications that things are changing as members of OMC become increasingly interested in having their views represented on local issues.¹¹⁵ A significant step was taken in 1982 when OMC, along with the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Bergthaler Church, negotiated an agreement with the school board in Osler. The churches hired a teacher to teach a religious education to several grades in the local elementary school.¹¹⁶ At the outset the school principal was reluctant to endorse the program, but their success in inaugurating the program (and the popularity of the program itself) helped OMC leaders realize the degree of influence they could assert within the community.¹¹⁷ Gradually OMC became interested in extending its influence on other fronts. In 1989, opposition to the presence of a Beer Garden at a local Sports Day resulted in an agreement by the Osler Parks and Recreation Board to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages at subsequent

¹¹⁴OMC has participated in various “outreach” endeavours: in addition to being a part of various evangelistic crusades in the area (see e.g., Minutes of the Osler Mission Chapel and Bergthaler Ministerial Meeting, 22 November 1988), it has organized an annual Daily Vacation Bible School program for local children. The Missions Board has sponsored 5-day clubs for children in communities like Crystal Springs, Yellow Creek and Meskanow, and an annual “Christmas parcel outreach” (MOMCMB, 26 November 1987). In 1988 plans were made to participate in the “Why Encounter” program which aimed to place a book by this title in every home in Osler. Participation came to an abrupt end when they discovered that the book included a two-page article featuring the work of Mother Theresa. Outreach programs organized by OMC tend to be event-oriented and generally only a minority of members are involved.

¹¹⁵This is due in part to the way congregational demographics have changed: the generation that is now entering adulthood has no living memory of the OC church and has little interest in preserving some of the practices derived from that experience. They also vastly outnumber the older members who were initially involved in the schism with the OC.

¹¹⁶MOMCMB, 11 March 1982.

¹¹⁷Shortly after the program was started, the Bergthaler church withdrew its support in order to focus its resources on developing a new private school called Valley Christian Academy (VCA) located one-half mile west of Osler. The school extracted more than 200 students from other schools in the district. To stem the flow, local schools have become more sensitive to the demands of the various church communities. Approximately 50-60 students from OMC attend VCA each year.

events.¹¹⁸ In 1993, OMC helped facilitate a petition against the Wagon Wheel Restaurant in the neighbouring community of Warman which had applied for a licence to sell alcoholic beverages. The AB sent a spokesperson representing the congregation to a hearing organized by the Liquor Licensing Commission.¹¹⁹ During the early 1990s several younger members of the congregation began participating in local school board and municipal politics. The visible evangelical presence in the Reform Party prompted many at OMC to become members of the party prior to the 1993 federal election. For most, this was the first time that their involvement in the political process had extended beyond merely casting a ballot. Only time will tell if it is the beginning of a new trend.¹²⁰

(4) The duple theme of acceptance and reticence is evident also in the area of post-secondary education. The individuals involved in starting OMC felt much more acutely the impact of their limited schooling than had any other preceding OC generation. (It is not accidental that they were also the first generation of OC Mennonites who had not received any of their elementary education in the German parochial schools formerly run by the OC.) In addition to other forces that were converging to bring about change among the OC Mennonites in the area, this generation saw other Mennonites utilizing higher education and enjoying the benefits of professional positions: they felt impaired by the lack of education in attempts to become involved in community affairs. They believed that without more education than what they themselves had obtained--few had completed more than grade eight--their children would be still more disadvantaged.¹²¹ As a result, members of OMC encouraged the completion of a high school education as well as endorsing certain post-secondary educational alternatives.¹²²

The evangelical environment along with its missionary impulse made Bible schools the post-secondary educational option of choice.¹²³ During its twenty-year history, more than 80 individuals from OMC have attended such schools--this represents about 20% of all individuals who have been significantly involved with the church. Almost half of these students completed a

¹¹⁸MOMCAB, 6 July 1989; MOMCAB, 3 August 1989; MOMCAB, 7 September 1989; MOMCAB, 5 April 1990.

¹¹⁹MOMCAB, 2 December 1993; MOMCAB, 6 January 1994. The Administration Board appointed this individual as an OMC representative without obtaining approval from the brotherhood. The vigorous participation by OMC people at this hearing is somewhat incongruous with the fact that few, if any, have any inhibitions about frequenting licensed establishments elsewhere.

¹²⁰When OMC interest in social concerns is manifested at all it remains focused almost exclusively on the local district: they did not participate in the debates surrounding the proposed construction of a uranium refinery near Warman between 1976 and 1980; in 1985 an invitation to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada was declined (MOMCAB, 6 June 1985). Even the proposal in early 1994 for the construction of a casino in Saskatoon did not generate concern.

¹²¹Many OC children wanted to continue past grade eight (in most cases they would have done so by correspondence) but were either explicitly forbidden to do so by their parents or circumstances made it necessary for them to quit school in order to assist with farming operations.

¹²²Their limited education left members of OMC oblivious to the fact that previous generations of OC Mennonites had made significant personal sacrifices to retain control of their own schools in order to resist the government's exploitation of the public education system to nationalize ethnic groups.

¹²³Bible schools or institutes typically offer a Bible-centred, intensely practical, lay-oriented program of post-secondary theological training that is at, or slightly above, a high school level. They are different from Bible colleges which are degree-conferring and whose curricula include more liberal arts or general education courses.

three-year diploma program. These students have made a substantial contribution to the life of the congregation through their active support and loyal participation in church programs.

Several local transdenominational schools--Millar College of the Bible (formerly Millar Memorial Bible Institute) located in Pambrun, SK, and Nipawin Bible Institute located in Nipawin, SK, have consistently been the most popular choices.¹²⁴ These schools strengthened the kind of biblicism preferred by leaders at OMC as well as their preference for non-denominational "faith" missions over denominational efforts. More important is the way these schools reinforced suspicions of higher education that lingered in the minds of many at OMC as a vestige of their OC past (university and seminary education was routinely denigrated and discouraged at schools like Millar).¹²⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that only 1% have opted to attend a Bible college, and only 3% have completed some university training.¹²⁶ (This compares to 7% who have completed some training program at a technical institute.) Although the opportunity to attend Bible school represented an educational advance, the limited range of curricular options has done little to enhance job prospects for their students.¹²⁷ Even those interested in full-time ministry have found this to be true as mission agencies have increasingly demanded a baccalaureate degree and/or seminary training as a minimum prerequisite for acceptance. More serious is the predominant focus on a "practical" curriculum within these Bible schools which minimizes the importance of a scholarly study of the Bible and theology. Although most students find the nurturing environment of these institutions helpful, the rather superficial knowledge of the Bible and developments within contemporary theology often makes it difficult for them to recognize and critique effectively the values and ideas shaping contemporary society.

Independence versus Denominationalism

The organizational structure initially devised by OMC was a hybrid between that used by the OC and the CMC. Gradually it came to resemble neighbouring Protestant churches particularly as it struggled with a move away from a structure in which church leaders served as life-long volunteers towards a model in which pastoral staff receive a salary. The evolution of OMC's organizational structure towards a professionalised ministry and its changing perception

¹²⁴Millar was started in 1928 by Rev. William J. Millar. He was converted in Scotland through the ministry of Dwight L. Moody, and after working as an assistant to T.T. Shields at his Toronto seminary, moved west to start a Bible school in Moose Jaw. After four years, it was relocated at Pambrun. When Millar died, a young graduate of the school, Herbert W. Peeler took over inaugurating a teaching career that spanned sixty years. Nipawin Bible Institute was started in 1935 and was originally known as Two Rivers Bible School (Carlea, SK) before moving to Nipawin. Both schools had ties to American fundamentalism and served as training centres for many transdenominational evangelical mission organizations. Less frequented schools include Peace River Bible Institute (Sexsmith, AB), Prairie Bible Institute (Three Hills, AB), Bethany Bible Institute (Hepburn, SK), and Swift Current Bible Institute (Swift Current, SK). A number of individuals have also taken extension courses offered by Briercrest Bible College.

¹²⁵A common saying among the OC epitomizes their anti-educational and even anti-intellectual attitude: *de dolla jeleat, de ea fekjeat* (the more educated or learned, the sooner confused or perverted). However, this attitude reflects more than a crude anti-intellectualism: it embodied a community defense mechanism. OC leaders correctly intuited that exposure to other ideas would inevitably precipitate change.

¹²⁶Only two individuals have attended seminary, and only two have completed graduate work at universities (neither of these individuals are presently involved with OMC). A significantly higher proportion of those who have attended university are no longer part of the OMC than of those who attended only Bible schools.

¹²⁷Even those interested in full-time ministry have found this to be true as mission agencies and denominations have increasingly demanded a baccalaureate degree and/or seminary training as a minimum prerequisite for acceptance.

of and response towards the CMC reflect its growing preference for the ethos and practices common within evangelical Protestantism.

During its first year of existence the OMC group convened monthly brotherhood meetings at which all decisions were made including mundane matters such as the purchase of construction materials, the planning of services,¹²⁸ the dispersal of offerings, as well as the more consequential decisions concerning negotiations with the CMC. Unlike the OC system in which the bishop was given the final word, the OMC group tried to obtain a consensus prior to proceeding. Only when this proved impossible would a formal vote take place. While Jake Wiebe was, on account of his status as a minister, the more visible spokesperson for the group at the outset, it was the organizational experience and initiative of two brothers, Cornie Guenther and Peter Guenther, that contributed substantially to the actual formation of a new church. These two individuals applied to the new undertaking the administrative experience gained while serving on the boards of local community co-operatives. While Wiebe was employed by a construction firm in Saskatoon as a crane operator, these two grain farmers devoted considerable time and energy during the winter months to church activities.

Early in 1975 plans were made to contact the leaders of the CMC in Manitoba about the possibility of joining their denomination.¹²⁹ A delegation visited Steinbach in March 1975. For the group at Osler, the immediate issue was the desire to obtain certification for Jake Wiebe authorizing him to preside at weddings and funerals. However, underlying this concern was also the fact that joining another denomination would alleviate the necessity of completing what appeared at the time as a daunting project: applying for government registration and a tax exemption number required a more sophisticated organizational structure--including a formal constitution--than they had constructed at the time.¹³⁰ Following a visit and a presentation in July 1975 by Bishop Henry K. Schellenburg (1914-1990) the group voted in favour of applying for entry into the denomination.¹³¹ Particularly appealing was the familiarity of many CMC customs (e.g., the use of a catechism, brotherhood meetings and three church offices), and the promise of assistance in organizing a church. CMC leaders explicitly precluded the possibility of financial assistance. They outlined a number of conditions for acceptance which was preceded by the unambiguous directive that the new group agree to "abide by the rules set down by the CMC

¹²⁸Some of the more routine details were delegated to a Program Committee which formed in January 1975 to organize and coordinate monthly Sunday evening services (MOMCB, 20 January 1975).

¹²⁹Like the OC, the CMC has its historical roots in the Bergthal Colony in South Russia. After settling in southern Manitoba they too, albeit somewhat less rigorously than the OC, preferred the autonomy gained by geographical and cultural isolation. In 1974, the group had nine congregations in the Steinbach area with membership numbering approximately 2,000. For OMC, the idea of joining the CMC came largely as the result of a precedent established by a group of OC Mennonites in Prespatou, BC, who had been excommunicated in 1974 for participating in a community Bible study led by a local school teacher, and who had decided to join the CMC (MOMCB, 16 December 1974; MOMCB, 20 January 1975).

¹³⁰In addition to feeling a certain degree of intimidation, the OMC group feared that the entire process would take an undue length of time. As a result, an arrangement was negotiated by which Jake Wiebe was registered as a minister under the auspices of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. This remained in effect until the end of 1978 (MOMCB, 7 September 1978).

¹³¹MOMCB, 28 July 1975. Prior to coming Schellenburg offered to conduct a communion service during his visit (MOMCB, 3 April 1975). This gesture was gratefully accepted, and reveals how formal ecclesiastical sanction was still deemed necessary in order to participate in the sacrament.

Gemeinde and ministerial.”¹³² The CMC ministerial were not happy about certain changes already made by the OMC: prior to acceptance into the denomination they asked the group to reinstitute segregated seating and to insure that services were more bilingual rather than exclusively English. Although some members of OMC were disappointed by such an order they were too deferential to ministerial authority to criticize loudly.

In response to their decision to join the CMC, a new organizational structure was instituted in October 1975. Familiar to the group at Osler were the three church offices designated by the CMC: deacons, ministers and a bishop.¹³³ Because the CMC refused to recognize any offices held by individuals at OMC prior to joining, a ministerial election was conducted in October 1975. Jake Wiebe was re-elected as a minister and Cornie Guenther was chosen as deacon (three years later Guenther was elected as a minister).¹³⁴ All individuals elected to church offices were expected to volunteer their time.¹³⁵ An Administration Committee (later renamed the OMC Board of Administration but commonly referred to as the AB) comprised of four elected laymen and all members of the ministerial including deacons was formed. Although the monthly brotherhood meetings held at the outset had reflected a new emphasis on the participation of the laity, and had resulted in a genuine democratization of power, the initiation of new programs and the ongoing growth of the new congregation made such a system of governance cumbersome and time-consuming. While the AB’s relationship to the brotherhood has never been clearly spelled out, it is (at least theoretically) accountable to the brotherhood. But as the AB assumed more responsibility, it became the centre of power within the new congregation. All decisions affecting the entire group have in some way been shaped by this group. The number involved gradually increased as representatives from the different church programs were included. Without a clear mandate and with a somewhat ambiguous line of accountability, it has often operated in the arbitrary manner reminiscent of the style used by the OC ministerial. Brotherhood meetings became more infrequent, sometimes only once or twice per annum.

Several important administrative changes took place in 1983. To enhance its efficiency, the AB decided to designate a chairperson. The first person in this position was Ken Guenther, a Bible college graduate who was at the time a participant in an internship program instituted by the church to help prospective missionary candidates obtain ministry experience.¹³⁶ From this point onwards the AB delegated minor decisions to other committees, and focused its attention

¹³²MOMCB, 2 October 1975.

¹³³In the OC system, however, the three offices were similar but differentiated more clearly: deacons were charged with practical tasks of discipline and administration, ministers were primarily exhorters and teachers, and bishops served as the overseers of several congregations and commanded much deference. The significant level of lay participation and the utilization of aspects of the CMC structure diminished the gap between clergy and laity that existed within the OC system.

¹³⁴The ordination of these two individuals on 11 July 1976 also served as a celebration marking the culmination of the construction of the group’s first facility.

¹³⁵The only other individual to be elected as a minister during OMC’s twenty-year history is Bill Janzen (March 1994-). Deacons include John Adrian (October 1974-89); Peter Guenther (May 1982-); Jake Fehr (October 1984-); Herman Neufeld (June 1990-); and John Unger (January 1994-).

¹³⁶MOMCAB, 2 December 1983. CMC leaders in Manitoba repeatedly expressed their disapproval of both the internship program, as well as the practise of having a non-ordained person chairing the AB. Since 1988 one of the OMC ministerial has held this position.

on the formulation of policies and the supervision of church programs. Every church program was subjected to a careful evaluation. Important also was the formal separation of the AB and Missions Board which had been meeting jointly since 1976 when the Missions Board was first created to coordinate the dispersal of funds and to promote missions.¹³⁷ This move reflected a partial de-centralization of power and once again permitted a greater degree of lay participation in the day-to-day decisions of the church. No longer as preoccupied with internal matters, the AB turned its attention, at least for a time, to encouraging outreach initiatives.¹³⁸

In October 1983, the matter of full-time financial support for ministers and the designation of a “leading minister” was raised for the first time.¹³⁹ Following a discussion at a CMC ministerial conference, the debate spilled over into OMC where the two ideas were not warmly welcomed.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the AB circulated a questionnaire in February 1984 to poll its members: 75% of respondents voted in favour of retaining the present system.¹⁴¹ Moreover, both ministers appeared reticent about such an innovation and insisted that they did not want change simply for the sake of change, but would be “willing to submit if the brethren” indicated otherwise. This initial indifference soon changed, and the issue became a Pandora’s box that precipitated considerable tension and the most significant organizational change since their departure from the OC.

The first debate on the issue was generated by a proposal in October 1987 to hire Mel and Liz [Wiebe] Sigglekow as youth pastors.¹⁴² Despite being well-qualified and experienced in youth work, the proposal was rejected. In part this was due to fierce opposition to their perceived openness towards “rock music,” and a concern that Mel was not a Mennonite. But veiling these more visible concerns was the intuitive recognition that acceptance of the proposal would alter fundamentally the assumptions underlying the church’s system of governance. Approving the proposal would not merely have been an endorsement of the Sigglekows, but it would have implicitly signalled the acceptance of the practice of hiring an outsider as a minister rather than electing an insider; it would have meant funding a new, young minister without consideration for the significant personal and financial sacrifices made by the other two ministers; it would have meant treating a member of the ministerial as an “employee” with a job description, a supervisor and a negotiable length of term rather than as a neighbour in the community who had been given, and who had accepted, a life-long responsibility.

Initial reticence changed rather dramatically with the announcement to the AB by Jake Wiebe in October 1989 that he could no longer maintain a concurrent commitment to OMC and

¹³⁷MOMCB, 2 February 1984.

¹³⁸To some extent the effect of this de-centralization has been reversed by the recent decision to restrict voting to members of the ministerial and the three elected laypersons on the AB (MOMCB, 8 June 1993). This left the non-elected representatives on the AB without real power: as a result they are no longer willing to remain as active participants at meetings opting instead to submit their reports and leave. The result has been a greater centralization of power in the hands of a few particularly the ministerial.

¹³⁹At the time, the two ministers were both receiving a \$200 monthly allowance from OMC.

¹⁴⁰Cornie Guenther reported that the idea of full-time financial support for ministers “had not received too much support due to the reluctance of some pastors giving up their jobs. The Deacons Committee felt this item to be a local decision” (MOMCAB, 8 December 1983).

¹⁴¹MOMCB, 7 June 1984.

¹⁴²MOMCB, 8 October 1987.

his employer without substantial changes to one or both areas of responsibility.¹⁴³ At a subsequent brotherhood meeting Wiebe reiterated his concern. Despite some hesitation about the need for more careful reflection about the potential implications, many felt a sense of obligation to support Wiebe who had volunteered his time to OMC for many years. As a result, a rather motion was passed to provide Wiebe with a full-time salary.¹⁴⁴ The AB was given the delicate job of implementing the change: it was delegated still further to a Pastoral Pay Committee chaired by deacon Jake Fehr. Subsequent meetings discussed matters like the creation of a job description, determining an appropriate length of term, Wiebe's lack of education, the financial impact on other church budget commitments, the possibility of creating resentment between the two ministers by a practice that could easily be perceived as partisan, the different expectations that the congregation would have by having one minister salaried, etc.¹⁴⁵ Although Wiebe began drawing a salary from the church in 1990, the Pastoral Pay Committee struggled for several years to resolve both the questions raised by this transition and the growing tensions between the two ministers.

During the summer of 1993 the Pastoral Pay Committee finally presented a "Pastoral Staff Policy" to the brotherhood for scrutiny and approval. The change from a "self-supporting pastoral system" to "a need-oriented pastoral support system" proved to be a clever compromise between the former system of elected volunteers used by OMC and the system of "calling" (and funding) a minister used by many Protestant churches.¹⁴⁶ The new policy continued to affirm the practice of electing one of its own members whenever it was deemed necessary or desirable to have another minister, but it recognized that henceforth all ministers would be entitled to financial remuneration. However, ministers would only receive funding if deemed eligible by the financial formula outlined in the policy.¹⁴⁷ This arrangement addressed a concern raised by some that Wiebe was receiving preferential treatment. Both ministers endorsed the policy even though it meant a small reduction in salary for Wiebe and the formula disqualified Guenther entirely on account of his farm income.¹⁴⁸ Both ministers feared a system based entirely on performance

¹⁴³Wiebe declared that it "was becoming very hard for him to keep on working and to carry out the responsibilities as a pastor" (MOMCAB, 5 October 1989). Changes in the company which employed Wiebe had resulted in a longer working day making it impossible for him to fulfil his pastoral responsibilities. Complaints by members about his inaccessibility, and a request by a member to the ministerial that Wiebe be salaried by the church also expedited Wiebe's decision.

¹⁴⁴MOMCB, 24 October 1989. Wiebe recognized the potential for conflict and stated that his acceptance of a salary from OMC would be contingent upon the approval of the other members of the ministerial.

¹⁴⁵See e.g., "A Response to the Pastoral Staff Policy," by Jake Doerksen and Ken Guenther (n.d.), and the discussion at a brotherhood meeting in January 1990 at which Bishop Bill Hildebrandt was in attendance (MOMCB, 15 January 1990).

¹⁴⁶Discussion of the new policy occupied the better part of two brotherhood meetings (see MOMCB, 8 June 1993; MOMCB, 14 June 1993).

¹⁴⁷Despite retaining for nearly two decades the traditional practise of having ministers volunteer their time, this change is presented as being in accordance with "biblical principles [that] pastors be paid" (MOMCB, 14 June 1993). The fact that these "biblical principles" were not recognized and applied sooner illustrates how this cultural transition too was legitimized by an appeal to the Bible.

¹⁴⁸The formula uses the combined income of both the husband and wife, and takes into account the number of dependent children: when the practice of using household income was questioned at a brotherhood meeting the member

which might leave them vulnerable to dismissal by a vote of confidence. In keeping with the traditional assumption that ministers are “for life,” the policy carefully sidesteps the matter of prerequisite qualifications, lines of accountability and protocol to be used for evaluating the performance of ministers. In response to a question concerning the procedure to follow if a minister “does not meet expectations,” the Committee rather ambiguously suggested that any problems could be deferred to “the local ministerial or AB, and if it still can not be resolved then it would be presented to the conference executive.”¹⁴⁹

The policy will likely serve only as an interim solution especially if OMC’s younger members continue to demand a fully professionalised ministry; it is a half-way house to a system in which fully-trained and fully-salaried ministers will be used by the church. The policy requires that replacements or associates be sought after the present ministers reach sixty years of age: the five years prior to mandatory retirement at age sixty-five (a CMC regulation) would ostensibly allow younger associate(s) to obtain formal training, and to retain present employment prior to assuming full responsibilities. Exactly how this will be accepted by newly elected ministers remains to be seen.

Complicating further the Pastoral Pay Committee’s struggle has been the directive on the part of Bishop Bill Hildebrandt--a demand successfully incorporated into the CMC constitution--that each CMC church with two or more ministers designate a “leading pastor” to which other ministers and the AB would be subordinate. Control of local congregations would thereby reside in the hands of the ministerial who would ultimately be answerable to the Bishop. It was rejected in OMC largely because of the way it mitigated against the more collegial consensus-seeking partnership arrangement that has prevailed between Wiebe and Guenther. Despite the fact that it remains as a requirement within the constitution, OMC continues to defer and avoid the matter.¹⁵⁰

Although OMC leaders deliberately sought out the CMC and continue to recognize the value of being part of a conference,¹⁵¹ they have become increasingly interested in preserving their independence. In part OMC’s autonomy within the CMC has been the natural consequence of its geographical distance from Manitoba, but it is also a response to certain practices and proposals by conference leaders. During the past two decades, a variety of small conflicts between CMC leaders and OMC have accrued to create a growing sense of alienation, and a defensiveness within OMC about retaining control over its own affairs. For example, during the late 1970s, discussions took place concerning several organizational changes within the CMC: in addition to formulating a statement of faith, the conference drafted a missions handbook containing the suggestion that all funds designated for missions in each congregation be forwarded to, and dispersed by, the conference Missions Board.¹⁵² This was vigorously resisted by OMC. Although relations have always been cordial, the level of financial support sent to the

was curtly reminded that “the husband and wife should be a team” (MOMCB, 14 June 1993). In reality, traditional patriarchal values continue to keep the wives of ministers from being equal members of a “team,” and all women at OMC from being “full” members. In the words of one woman, “we get all the responsibilities but none of the privileges!”

¹⁴⁹MOMCB, 14 June 1993.

¹⁵⁰MOMCB, 8 June 1993; MOMCB, 30 November 1993; MOMCB, 8 January 1994. See also “The Constitution and By-laws of the Chortizer Mennonite Conference” (October 1991).

¹⁵¹See Cornie Guenther, “The Advantages of Belonging to a Conference,” Paper presented to the CMC Annual Meeting, 1987.

¹⁵²MOMCAB/MB, 4 January 1979.

conference remains an ongoing point of contention, and as a result, the conference has made repeated attempts to convince OMC to increase it.¹⁵³ In 1979 OMC requested a change in the proposed constitution that would permit the use of non-alcoholic wine or grape juice for communion. It took five years before they were successful in this endeavour.¹⁵⁴ During the 1980s CMC leaders made a more conscious attempt to emphasize Anabaptist distinctives like nonresistance. The fact that the doctrine of nonresistance was not emphasised during their particular OC experience, and the influence of evangelical voices that categorize such distinctives as “non-essentials,” prompted OMC leaders to reject recommendations by CMC leaders that OMC become more Anabaptist. OMC leaders ardently reject by pejoratively designating as “liberal” Anabaptist peace motifs even though they are unfamiliar with the work of Anabaptist theologians. This aversion is reflected in OMC’s relationship to Steinbach Bible College which is run by a consortium of Mennonite groups including the CMC. The school has repeatedly been denied permission to do student recruitment at OMC and OMC students have yet to attend the college.

Another persistent irritant remains the rather provincial refusal on the part of CMC leaders to include representation from churches outside of Manitoba on conference committees. Exacerbating the sense of isolation created by such a discriminatory practice has been the neglect on the part of the conference executive to circulate its agenda in advance of conference brotherhood and ministerial meetings. As a result, it was often difficult for leaders from churches outside Manitoba to include matters for discussion. In addition, OMC leaders repeatedly requested that a more equitable system of representation be developed for conference changes to the constitution (e.g., a delegate system).¹⁵⁵ Since the mid-1980s, OMC leaders have become more assertive in their demands instead of deferentially waiting for action on the part of conference bureaucracy. In 1990 OMC flatly rejected the suggestion by conference leaders that all church properties be titled by the conference rather than by trustees of the local congregations, thereby making it more difficult for individual congregations to leave the conference.¹⁵⁶ The growing disparity between the centralized hierarchical system envisioned by the Bishop, and the more autonomous structure preferred by OMC make further conflict inevitable--at a brotherhood meeting at OMC in early 1994 the value of remaining a part of the CMC was openly pondered.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Few would deny the significant (but varying) influence that evangelical Protestantism has had on the approximately twenty-five Mennonite groups in Canada. Some decry the “awful and terrible destruction” it presumably caused, or see it as an alien force that has disrupted and

¹⁵³MOMCMB, 30 January 1986; MOMCMB, 2 February 1987.

¹⁵⁴MOMCB, 4 October 1979; MOMCAB, 15 October 1981; MOMCAB, 17 October 1983; MOMCB, 2 February 1984; MOMCAB, 5 April 1984; MOMCAB, 5 September 1985.

¹⁵⁵Letter from OMC Administration Board to CMC Ministerial Executive, 4 October 1991. At present, an annual brotherhood meeting is held in one of the Manitoba churches at which conference decisions are made. Representation from the different churches, particularly those located outside of Manitoba, has always been rather haphazard.

¹⁵⁶MOMCAB, 6 November 1990.

¹⁵⁷MOMCB, 29 January 1994. One should note that leaders within CMC churches within Manitoba are not unanimous in their support for a more centralized structure.

confused the religious life of Mennonite individuals and communities:¹⁵⁸ others hail it as the culturally neutral essence of biblical Christianity that liberated Mennonites from the spiritual sterility of Mennonite traditions and the artificial boundaries created by ethnicity. While these polarities still persist in the discussions of the relationship between evangelical Protestantism and Mennonites, neither adequately accounts for all the dynamics within the story of OMC.¹⁵⁹

Contrary to those who characterize the influence of evangelicalism on Mennonites in exclusively negative terms, the people at OMC unanimously see their transition away from the OC as a positive experience. As “the world” encroached into areas over which the OC had once been able to maintain exclusive control its objective of isolation became impossible to maintain. In its reaction to forces it could neither understand nor withstand the OC strategy gradually became irrelevant and even oppressive. The North American expression of evangelicalism became a desirable religious option because it offered what was perceived as both a spiritual and cultural emancipation. It provided an alternate religious (and cultural) system that was better able to interpret the modern world to a group of traditional, religiously-minded Mennonites. In part, it was able to do so because of its affinity with certain priorities held by this group of OC Mennonites. Evangelicalism served as an important conduit towards acculturation into contemporary Canadian culture by helping OMC keep certain religious priorities intact.

While members of OMC may be correct in attributing the transition that began in 1974 as a spiritual awakening, a closer look reveals an intricate combination of concurrent theological, sociological, psychological and cultural forces at work.¹⁶⁰ The failure to recognize that human motivations and behaviours (including the construction of religious institutions) are always a complex combination of the “sacred” and “profane,” and the inability to account for these forces left OMC vulnerable to some rather unexpected consequences. The failure to see that its preference for evangelicalism represented a critique of OC traditions and the adoption of an

¹⁵⁸See comments made by James Urry in David Arnason, “A History of Turnstone Press,” in *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite/s Writing in Canada* (Waterloo: Univ. of Waterloo Press, 1992), 214; and Ted Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

¹⁵⁹A thorough study of the relationship between the two movements within the North American context remains a significant lacuna. Some helpful articles include Perry Bush, “Anabaptism Born Again: Mennonites, New Evangelicals, and the Search for a Useable Past, 1950-1980,” *Fides et Historia* 25, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 1993): 26-47; C. Norman Kraus, “Evangelicalism: A Mennonite Critique,” in *The Varieties of American Evangelicalism*, eds. Donald W. Dayton, and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Richard Kyle, “The Mennonite Brethren and American Evangelicalism: An Ambivalent Relationship,” *Direction* 20, No. 1 (Spring 1991): 26-37; Royden Loewen, “Cars, Commerce, Church: Religious Conflict in Steinbach, Manitoba, 1905-1930,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993): 110-134; Kevin Enns-Rempel, “The Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches and the Quest for Religious Identity,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 63 [July 1989]: 247-264; Karl Peter, et al., “The Dynamics of Religious Defection among Hutterities,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, No. 4 (1982): 327-337; Rodney J. Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity: The Dynamics of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1987); John B. Toews, “The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology,” *Direction* 10, No. 3 (1981): 20-29; and Paul Toews, “Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges: A Response to Cultural Transitions?” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57, No. 3 (July 1983): 241-256.

¹⁶⁰I have looked primarily at some of the social forces at work, but the psychological dynamics involved in this transition could also have been included. One could, for example, argue that the considerable anxiety produced by uncertainty, the ambiguity of initiating new organizational structures, the exhilaration of discovering new ways of doing old things and of working together as a group, all produced a kind of euphoria and reinforced a homogeneity that was sometimes mistakenly attributed to spiritual revival. The desire to recover some of these dynamics has been, to a certain extent, an incentive behind the annual “revival meetings” conducted by OMC.

alternative “ideological community” and culture which could better facilitate an upward social mobility has left it unable (and perhaps also unwilling) to look critically at the individualistic (and materialistic) values absorbed in the process, and to recognize the extent to which OC values and practices continue to shape their lives.¹⁶¹ Despite exchanging OC traditions for a more modern evangelical faith the struggle within OMC to be “in the world but not of it” continues.

¹⁶¹Over time, OMC distanced itself from some (but not all) of the more contentious influences within evangelicalism: e.g., the material produced by Perry F. Rockwood, a rather belligerent fundamentalist, gradually fell into disuse.