

They Tell Each Other, They are Still Who They Were.  
The  
Struggle for Self Definition in Minority Cultures:  
the Case of  
the General Conference Mennonites in British Columbia  
by

JOHANN DAVID FUNK  
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APPROVAL PAGE

Name: Johann David Funk

Degree: Masters of Arts  
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Examining Committee: Chair: Dr. Hari Sharma

---

Dr. John M. Whitworth  
Senior Supervisor

---

Robert W. Wyllie  
Professor of Sociology

---

Dr. T. Rennie Warburton  
External Examiner  
Professor of Sociology  
University of Victoria

Date Approved May 3, 1993

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**Author:**

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**(Signature)**

Johann David Funk

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**(Name)**

May 3rd, 1993

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**(Date)**

## ABSTRACT

This study is framed within the debate in sociology and anthropology over forms of analysis that stress constancy versus change and universality versus difference, and argues that despite the weakening of cultural boundaries in Western society a concept of self can be formed, maintained and legitimated within minorities which are distinct from the dominant culture. The argument is supported by a study of the historical and contemporary struggle for self-definition in the Anabaptist tradition from its sixteenth century origins through to the General Conference Mennonites in British Columbia by examining life histories, historical documents, interviews and observations.

This socio-religious movement advocated a communitarian solution to the religious, political, economic and social ferment in sixteenth century Europe. The General Conference Mennonites in B.C. are one remaining expression of the movement as it continuously renegotiated its distinct identity over the past five centuries. Like many minority cultures, the Mennonites have legitimated their identity on religious grounds. However, religion in this study is seen within a matrix of structural and symbolic variables defining minority identities.

The theoretical model incorporates transactional processes, reflexivity, intentionality, history and power. The struggle for self-definition is characterized by definable transformations in form

which are the product of the continuous need to legitimize the minority identity, complexes of transactions involving internal and external factors and the reflexivity resulting from these processes.

This study supports the debate within the discipline that recognizes the limitations of the dominant forms of analysis that stress order and universality. The study tests and expands the discourse to include change, difference and struggle using insider categories to develop a more inclusive and comprehensive explanation for the persistence of minority cultures. The study also provides the social sciences with an analysis of the struggle for self definition in one group as a way of understanding minority cultures without imposing universalistic and assimilationist assumptions on the empirical evidence.

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## **PREFACE**

The theoretical orientation of the thesis was developed against a background of personal experience as a member of a minority culture and twenty years of direct involvement with aboriginal peoples in Canada. I came to Canada shortly after WWII as a member of a stigmatized minority. We were of German descent with a history of pacifism. Despite an official policy of cultural pluralism a prevailing ideology of Anglo-conformity dominated Canadian society and its institutions. English language use was strictly enforced at school and textbooks promoted an exclusively English cultural perspective. Jacob Wiens, a young agricultural economist at the time was informed he could not expect "going anywhere in the civil service" with his name and background (informal conversation September 21, 1992).

Aboriginal peoples continue to experience institutionalized segregation but with the same underlying assumption of eventual assimilation. A 1990 interview with a lawyer representing the Aboriginal Claims Commission in Vancouver revealed their belief that, "In one or two more generations Indians will become just another ethnic group like the Italians and the land claims process will become redundant" (November 15, 1990). The same day the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en who were pursuing a land claim through the courts, described the continuity of their cultural values and institutions. The following spring Hon. Chief Justice McEachern

ruled largely on the basis of behavioural assimilation, that the claimants no longer represented the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en who were entitled to an ancestral claim.

My exposure to Anthropology and Sociology at university suggests that similar underlying assumptions of homogenization and universality dominate much of traditional analysis. It is demonstrated by the emphasis on salvage anthropology and the preponderance of logical linear models in sociology. The theoretical perspective taken in the thesis is grounded in the experience of minority cultures and the reflexive activity within anthropology and sociology to qualify these traditional forms of analysis.

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

"Theorists of assimilation assume that the marketplace and modern industrial opportunities will seduce religious and cultural groups sucking them into the mainstream where they will lose their original identity and want to become like others. . . Religion, race, and language, some say, can become important foci to which groups commit themselves, so they will not assimilate but perpetuate a distinctive identity." (Driedger & Harder, 1990: 7)

Mennonite identity has been characterized as in 'crisis' and in 'ferment'. Calvin Redekop argues that Mennonite identity is haunted by an 'ethnic ghost' that thwarts the full realization of Mennonite peoplehood (1984: 133-146). He contends that the formation of 'a people of God' necessarily involves becoming a distinct group with the risk of developing ethnocentric behavior. A crisis in identity sets in when the cultural identity is equated with the kingdom of God and supplants it as the cultural norm.

Leo Driedger and Leland Harder (1990) contend that Mennonite identity is experiencing serious disruption as it reorients itself in the context of modernity. Both Redekop and, Driedger and Harder's conclusions are premised on an understanding of identity as a stable niche or the essential quality of the self or group. Driedger and Harder's position is less insistent on absolute permanence than that of Redekop. Drawing on the processual elements in the social psychological definitions of identity of Natanson (1970, journeying self), Goffman (1959, performing self), Berger and Luckmann (1966, role-playing self) they synthesize a definition of identity as a 'niche-constructing self'. They suggest, "Identity may well include features of both permanence and performance. Self or group identity may be in trouble if it becomes too much one or the other." (Driedger & Harder, 1990: 165) The argument is that an insistence on

permanence leads to stagnation and an over-emphasis on process results in rootlessness.

Berger places identity within the broader framework of the social construction of reality. The implication of this is that the autonomous self is an anomaly. He argues that the ordering of experience, essential for the development of an identity, takes place as a social process which is imposed on the experiences and meanings of individuals.

"Humans are congenitally compelled to impose meaningful order upon reality. This order, however presupposes the social enterprise of ordering world construction. To be separated from society exposes the individual to a multiplicity of dangers which we are unable to cope with ourselves" (Berger, 1967: 22).

The logical consequences of failing to identify with a socially constructed meaningful order are segregation and meaninglessness.

The thesis generally agrees with an expanded 'niche-constructing' definition of identity as developed by Driedger and Harder, and Berger's socially constructed self. Still problematic in these formulations is a neglect of the role of human agency in 'niche-constructing,' and the underlying assumption of social homogenization.

The tendency inherent in this kind of argument in a plural society ignores factors of difference and struggle that effectively marginalize minority perspectives from the processes of the social construction of meaningful realities. Therefore, minority cultures which represent alternate and/or competing forms of 'socially constructed meaningful order' are rendered insignificant if not detrimental to the orientation of the self by the majority culture. Alternative or protest cultures cannot depend on support from

society and are subject to various degrees of social ambivalence, segregation and/or sanction. The maintenance of minority identities demands a more complete mobilization of the energies and commitment of its members as noted for sects by Wilson (1982). These represent the main form minority cultures take in western societies. The struggle for self-definition in minority cultures involves the additional effort and risk groups who define themselves as distinct or are seen as the social 'other' in society's experience.

The thesis questions the adequacy of traditional ethnography and the dominant universalist theories alone to explain the persistence and transformation of identity in cultures that have been identified as being distinct from the Anglo-Canadian majority (Forward, 1987; Norris, 1971). While the analysis of cultural behavior in traditional models provides a detailed descriptive analysis of cultural form, these models are limited in their ability to explain the processes that account for the formation, maintenance and legitimation of minority identities. They have difficulty accounting for their persistence through successive transformations of form beyond making essentialist assumptions about inevitable assimilation. A study of the Anabaptist tradition from its sixteenth century origins through to one aspect of its expression in the contemporary General Conference Mennonites in British Columbia provides the cultural context in which the conventional explanations of the historical and contemporary struggle for self-definition in minority cultures is tested and refined.

The thesis holds that the struggle for self-definition is not entirely over the replication of traditional form but involves processes of redefinition and reinvention. This begs the question of whether identity in minority cultures can be adequately explained by an analysis of cultural inventory or whether the processes that give rise to changes in form are significant elements in a more comprehensive analysis. The final problem that surfaces is, given the presence of form and process in the empirical evidence, can both be incorporated into a single conceptual frame or are they mutually exclusive theoretical approaches? Taken separately they represent partial explanations, and combined they logically represent a more complete explanation. The dilemma is that this results in a more complex debate over the significance of the dichotomies of homogenization and difference, stasis and change, and order and struggle.

Chapter two outlines the theoretical orientation of the thesis as it developed out of the empirical evidence and the current reflexive processes within Anthropology and Sociology. These have prompted a re-examination of the key concepts and theoretical assumptions that have traditionally dominated the disciplines. As the intellectual framework for understanding key concepts has expanded, the limitations of classical theory have been exposed making room for new models to be explored. The shift has also called for a re-evaluation of methodological approaches.

The chapter outlines the critique of traditional definitions of culture and knowledge and the challenge this presents to traditional theory. Out of this debate a generative model is developed for

understanding the transactional nature of the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures. These transactions are seen as having both internal and external dimensions. The model holds that the outcomes of these transactions seldom have any finality attached to them and usually represent a reorganization of positions taken in the transactional process. Contrary to the linear assumptions in traditional universalist theories of homogenization, the generative model developed in the thesis accommodates reflexive processes to account for the recovery of relevant and accessible elements from history, a vision for the future and the desire to maintain a coherent cultural whole.

Finally, chapter two outlines the methodological approach taken in the thesis. Following Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989), emergent design allows the model to emerge out of the research data as tentative conclusions are tested and progressively refined within the research context.

Chapter three is a synthesis of library and archival research into the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition beginning with the sixteenth century origins in Europe through the Dutch-Prussian-Russian experience to contemporary B.C.<sup>1</sup> This longitudinal study tests the adequacy of traditional theory to explain the transformation of cultural form in minority cultures over time. An

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<sup>1</sup> The study is limited to this tradition since the vast majority of the 4,406 General Conference Mennonites in B.C. share in this history. In reality the Mennonite church is a world-wide communion of 856,600 members on all five continents, speaking 72 languages and organized into 171 independent Conferences (Goetz-Lichdi, 1990). The Conferences represent historical movements of convergence and divergence that flow from a common origin, and have developed a variety of expressions of the larger tradition. The General Conference Mennonites in B.C. are one distinct group among many.

overview of Anabaptist history and that of their successors indicates that the struggle for self-definition has been continuous and has involved several definable episodes of change. Most noteworthy are the transformations of identity from radical urban and village reformers (1525-1618), to quietist isolated rural communities (16th-18th century), semi-autonomous agricultural 'commonwealths' (1789-1917), frontier farmers in America (1659-1950), social pariahs (1918-1948) and finally into a partially integrated cultural minority in British Columbia .

The primary associations with the larger Mennonite community in North America that have significantly shaped General Conference Mennonite identity in the province are summarized in chapter four. General Conference Mennonites in B.C. come from the relatively unorganized *Kirchliche*<sup>2</sup> tradition. Their emigration to North America was made possible in large measure by the efforts of the General Conference Mennonite Church and other Mennonite co-religionists. The majority soon joined the General Conference Mennonite Church, a mid-nineteenth century movement among Swiss and South German Mennonites in the United States who had preceded them. This Conference was formed to resist the encroachment of North American revivalism and denominationalism through efforts to unify scattered and unorganized Mennonites, to provide more adequate training for leaders and to participate in the modern

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<sup>2</sup> The term *Kirchliche* was coined during the Russian period in which Mennonites controlled both the civil and religious life of their communities. A need arose to distinguish between the civil and religious authority. The religious community became the *Kirchen-Gemeinde* or *Kirchliche*. It refers to the form the Mennonite church took in Russia in which autonomous churches or clusters of churches existed under the authority of a bishop.



missions movement. The *Kirchliche* Mennonites were attracted to the General Conference Mennonite Church mainly through the efforts of *Reiseprediger*<sup>3</sup> appointed to locate and organize Mennonites scattered along the Canadian frontier.

Influenced by the General Conference experience and assisted by *Reiseprediger*, *Kirchliche* groups in Canada formed the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1903 and the Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia in 1937. Common to these independent levels of Conference are the principles of 'unity in essentials, tolerance in non-essentials', and a respect for congregational autonomy. This allowed for unity without uniformity and created the conditions for fraternal relations and joint action. The Conferences provided the initial mechanisms for the development of a distinct General Conference identity in the province.

Around the turn of the century some of the 6,931 *Kanadier*<sup>4</sup> Mennonites, who had emigrated from Russia to Manitoba between 1874 and 1880, (Epp, 1974: 200) began trickling into B.C. They were joined by a larger number of the 20,201 *Russlaender*<sup>5</sup> immigrants

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<sup>3</sup> A direct translation of *Reiseprediger* is itinerant minister. The *Reiseprediger* in the Mennonite context also served as evangelists, local organizers around whom scattered groups along the Canadian frontier rallied in an effort to reorient and reorganize their identity in the new environment.

<sup>4</sup> The term *Kanadier* refers to Mennonites and their descendents who entered Canada under an Order in Council dated August 13, 1873. The full text of the conditions and privileges in this document are given in Appendix E

<sup>5</sup> The distinction between *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* Mennonites went deeper than a difference in the time of immigration. By the time the *Russlaender* Mennonites arrived the Canadian government hesitated to allow them into the country. The emigration was made possible through a loan from the C.P.R. and a guarantee the new immigrants would not become a liability to the government purse. The distinction between these groups surfaced during WWII when the *Kanadier* insisted on their historical exemption from military service and the *Russlaender* were willing to negotiate a non-combatant alternative.

that left Russia in the aftermath of the Russian revolution (1922-1930), (Epp, 1982: 178) and 1,516 of the 6,153 Second World War refugees (1947-1950) who emigrated to Canada (J.J. Thiessen to Sara Lehn June 2, 1950).

In recent years all three levels of Conference have provided an organizational 'umbrella' for a number of Asian immigrant and refugee churches to organize after coming to Canada. These have joined the voluntary association of General Conference Mennonite Churches in B. C.<sup>6</sup> This relationship is the result of prior involvement in or contact with the international Mennonite community (70-80 countries), Mennonite relief and refugee resettlement programs abroad and the prominent role of Mennonites in refugee sponsorship programs in Canada that date back to 1874.<sup>7</sup> The B.C. General Conference Mennonites have provided a structure and support for groups of new immigrant and refugee Christians to organize into churches. These groups have grown as they have provided a culturally familiar host community for other new arrivals. The retention of the traditional congregational polity has allowed each of these churches to develop program and leadership

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<sup>6</sup> At the June 12-13, 1992 business sessions of the Conference of Mennonites in B.C. the languages represented included English, German, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Laotian, Spanish, Punjabi and Japanese.

<sup>7</sup> The Swiss and South German Mennonites who had settled in Southern Ontario served as the northern terminal of the 'underground railroad' for escaping slaves. When they heard of the plight of Mennonites in Russia they were quick to come to their assistance. Particularly J.Y. Shantz, a prominent businessman, assisted the government in attracting the Mennonites, negotiated the terms of entry, hosted the delegates on an exploratory trip to Manitoba, raised capital in loans and donations to assist the immigrants and supervised the entire operation.

independently but with an affinity to the larger Mennonite community.

Chapters five, six, and seven give attention to the identity of contemporary General Conference Mennonites living in the province. These chapters analyze the primary data of the contemporary identity of General Conference Mennonites in B.C. from life histories and interviews. The generative model outlined in chapter two was developed and refined against the background of this information. In the text the sources are cited as L (Life Histories), G (General Interviews) and S (Specific Interviews). These refer to the subjects listed in appendices A, B and C.

The analysis is limited to structural (territory, institutions, culture), symbolic (history, ideology, leadership) minority identification factors (Driedger & Harder, 1990), and sectarianism (Wilson, 1982). Historically, each of these have been important to Mennonite identity but needed to be redefined in the social and geographic context of B.C.

Canada Census reported 30,895 residents of British Columbia as Mennonites in 1981. This figure includes 8,572 members of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 4,406 members of the Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia popularly known as General Conference Mennonites (Loewen-Reimer, 1983: 51, 54), unofficial total membership of the six smaller groups of 550 (Burkinshaw, 1988: 310), children of members and persons retaining Mennonite cultural identification but not participating in the religious community.

With the exception of congregational histories and Conference year-books most of the literature on Mennonites in B.C. (Baerg 1967; Forward 1987; Krahn 1955; Norris 1971) avoids dealing with the diversity among the Mennonites and takes the Mennonite Brethren, the largest group, as being normative. While considerable commonality exists between groups, ever since their multiple origins in the sixteenth century, Mennonites have been characterized by marked differences. Mennonites in B.C. also exhibit this diversity. The smaller isolated groups have retained a strong sectarian and distinct traditional identity while the Mennonite Brethren have fully assimilated into North American Evangelicalism, according to John P. Schmidt (1991). The General Conference Mennonite identity with its strong local autonomy and tradition of tolerance is more diverse than either of these and spans the spectrum between these two poles.

Chapter five examines the importance of identification with territory for the development of separate institutions to provide for the continuity of a distinct cultural inventory. Since B.C. lacked the ideal conditions for realizing the formation of closed total communities Mennonites had to accommodate to urbanization, institutional competition and cultural integration. Attention shifted to developing a critical mass for the development of the institutions essential to the maintenance of a distinct identity.

In Chapter six the less visible symbolic identifications with history, ideology and leadership are examined. Ideology, divided into economic, political and religious categories, for purposes of analysis, is seen as the product of a reinterpretation of the past to

make it accessible and relevant for the present and consistent with a clear vision for the future. This process requires charismatic leadership or effective authority structures to provide historical continuity for Mennonite identity. The chapter outlines the variety of ways General Conference Mennonites identify with each of these factors, with attention given to the movement to a professional clergy and the influence of their co-religionists.<sup>8</sup>

In the seventh and final data chapter, General Conference Mennonite identification with sectarianism is examined using Wilson's (1982) continuum of 'world denying', 'world indifferent' and 'world enhancing.' This approach is amenable to understanding minority cultures like the General Conference Mennonites who are characterized by considerable internal diversity. A brief description of the geography and social environment is given as a background against which General Conference identity can be understood.

The concluding chapter applies the historical transformations of Anabaptist-Mennonite identity and the contemporary experience of General Conference Mennonites in B.C. to the theoretical orientation and generative model developed in chapter two. The adequacy of the traditional understanding of culture and knowledge to understand General Conference identity is discussed with reference to the dichotomies of stasis and change, order and struggle, and homogenization and difference. Also tested is the

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<sup>8</sup> The thesis accepts the plural nature of Christianity, and the complex patterns of associations and cooperation that have emerged. Co-religionists in this context refers to those groups with whom the General Conference Mennonites most easily associate. Broadly put this includes what Bibby (1987) and Burkinshaw (1988) call the Conservative Protestants and Schmidt (1991) labels North American Evangelicalism.

relationship between form and process in understanding minority identities. This discussion tests the adequacy of traditional analysis and whether a synthesis of form and process can provide a more complete explanation of the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures.

## **CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGY**

"I am not sure I can tell the truth. . . . I can only tell what I know." (Cree hunter in Clifford & Marcus, 1986: 8)

Important for understanding the generative model developed in this thesis are the reflexive processes within Anthropology and Sociology that have prompted a re-examination of the key concepts and theoretical assumptions that have traditionally dominated the disciplines. As the intellectual framework for understanding key concepts has expanded, the limitations of classical theory have been exposed making room for new models to emerge. The shift has also called for a re-evaluation of methodological approaches. This chapter outlines the critique of traditional definitions of culture and knowledge and the challenge this presents to traditional theory. Out of this debate a more comprehensive generative model is developed for understanding the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures. Finally a description of the methodology used in the research process is outlined.

### **Culture**

In classical thought culture is characterized by internal homogeneity, isolation and relative autonomy of a distinct group of people (Barth, 1969: 11; Rosaldo, 1989: 217). Culture is seen mainly as, "the 'informing spirit' of a whole way of life, which is manifest over the whole range of social activities but is most evident in 'specifically cultural' activities - a language, styles of art, kinds of intellectual work" (Williams, 1981: 11-12). This approach limits the ethnographic project to a description and comparison of cultural

form to establish the integrity of distinct cultures. The assumption that the sum of the cultural artifacts represent an integrated whole limits the explanations for changes in cultural inventory to theories of stress (anomie, alienation), loss and disintegration, particularly in the presence of power relationships in culture. In the case of minority cultures these are associated with inevitable assimilation based on universalizing principles of cultural homogenization.

The limitation of such a static view of culture has been recognized in the literature in the past twenty years (Williams 1981; Rosaldo 1989, Harries-Jones 1991; Barth 1969). Williams summarizes the critique of earlier formulations as, "A culture can never be reduced to its artifacts while it is being lived." (1960: 323) As an alternative they propose a more active model of culture that goes beyond the development of typologies based on cultural form to an analysis of the process of cultural production. What emerges beyond simple cultural replication so important to earlier theory, is a reflexive process in which culture is seen as also constitutive and acting more as a 'signifying system' that guides a continuous process of cultural production, reproduction and innovation (Williams 1981: 13).

Reflexivity refers to a group's capacity to act upon itself either in response to "historical work still available and significant for contemporary practice" (1981: 204), "a situation in which images of the future circle back to the present in order to orient present activity towards a future state" (Harries-Jones, 1985: 240) and efforts to maintain the integrity of the cultural whole (Williams, 1960: 313-34).



Rosaldo concludes that autonomous cultures are particularly untenable in the modern world and need to be seen more accurately as 'between cultures' that overlap and interact with each other. Implicit in this view is the importance of the boundaries between cultures where human difference, struggle and change are significant features (1989: 224). The acknowledgment of the dynamic nature of culture calls the more static focus of traditional views into question and prompts development of an action frame of reference for understanding culture.

## **Knowledge**

Equally important to the critique of traditional analysis is the reorientation to an understanding of knowledge. The notion of the social construction of knowledge has been widely accepted and so needs only to be summarized here. Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to a dialectical process of objectification, institutionalization and legitimation that constructs social reality. This has a number of implications for the traditional emphasis on the relationship between knowledge and truth. Firstly, it qualifies scientific knowledge as a specialized kind of knowledge which derives authority from specific scientific principles.

Secondly, the claim to objectivity in the social sciences is viewed as problematic if not meaningless. Neutrality and impartiality are characterized as ideal positions that cannot be supported in practice. The observer is recognized as a 'positioned subject' who interacts with other 'positioned subjects' in the ethnographic process and is therefore implicated in the process of

the cultural production being observed (Rosaldo, 1989: 1-21; Phillips, 1974: 69-70).

Thirdly, the product of scientific inquiry involves objectifying observations of 'culture in use' and subject to a further manipulation in the textual construction of the results. The argument is that the ethnographic process must be seen as transformational in that the observer's categories and interests are imposed on the observations. The text further reduces and alters the observations through the choice of literary style and explanatory imagery for an audience that is different from that of the subjects being studied (Harries-Jones, 1985: 224-246).

Fourthly, if knowledge is the product of social construction and reconstruction the premise of knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone is dismissed. Knowledge cannot be abstracted from social reality. Truth claims are therefore always someone's truth claims and not absolute or relative but constrained by social arrangements.

Fifthly, the adage that 'knowledge is power' is particularly applicable to the present information age. Scientific knowledge as one form of knowledge cannot distance itself from issues of dominance in society. The knowledge it produces intentionally or unintentionally influences power relations in society. As Nicolaus graphically described, sociologists (the same could be said for anthropologists),

"don the disguise of the people and go out to mix with the peasants in the 'field,' returning with books and articles that break the protective secrecy in which a subjugated population wraps itself, and make it more accessible to manipulation and control." (Nicolaus in Phillips, 1972: xv).

The reflexive processes in the social sciences have made an important corrective to their earlier 'truth claims'. They have recognized the character and limits of scientific knowledge, qualified its claims and placed it into a more active relationship and/or competition with other forms of knowledge in the process of being constructed within the social context.

The consequences of redefining key concepts such as culture and knowledge have prompted a review of the adequacy of traditional forms of analysis and challenged its primary authority within the social sciences. The debate in theory has developed on several fronts. Harries-Jones has characterized it as a conflict between quietism and advocacy. He argues that traditional theory "has obscured concept and object, theory and method" becoming "an exercise in reductionism which ought not be repeated." (1985: 230) He suggests that the problem with the marriage between Marxism and structuralism in traditional theory is an understanding of history as a construction of the intellect without reference to the "mental space within which cultural practices are really generated or produced." (229)

Rosaldo frames the debate as a conflict between forms of analysis. He rejects the hegemony of what he calls the 'objectivist and monumentalist' school mainly because it excludes culture, history and equality in its analysis. Because the traditional schools are based on their own intellectual constructs the 'truth' they represent is self confirming and resembles forms of prejudice (1989: 220-221). These arguments are echoed in the works of Bateman (1991), Clifford (1988), Williams (1981) who have

documented the relationship between knowledge and the formation of ideological positions. The object of their critique is not so much to negate traditional analysis but to expose its limitations and, "create, among other things, spaces for historically subordinated perspectives otherwise excluded or marginalized from official discourse." (Rosaldo, 1990: 1026) They advocate that theory should flow out of everyday experience rather than from mental abstractions developed outside of it. What this means practically is that knowledge in the social sciences is at best partial and tentative, and shares authority with the perspectives of the subjects it observes. Certainly, scientific knowledge can only claim primary authority when it bridges the gap between conceptual constructs and life 'as it is being lived.'

The theoretical orientation in which the thesis is set gives particular attention to insider perspectives for explaining how social realities are constructed, maintained and legitimated within minority cultures. Their experiences are essentially circumscribed by dominant elites who control the production of the form of knowledge that is regarded as 'truth' in a plural society. The problem is clearly focused

"whenever marginal peoples come into a historical or ethnographic space that has been defined by the Western imagination. "Entering the modern world," their distinct worlds quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced socialisms, these suddenly "backward" peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it." (Clifford, 1988: 5)

The debate is not so much over the value of models in the social sciences but the dominance of certain models in determining the

significance and shape of reality while restricting others from participating in its social construction, maintenance and legitimation.

The controversy is further compounded by the contrasting nature of forms of analysis. Clifford summarizes the problem as a conflict

"between two metanarratives: one of homogenization, the other of emergence; one of loss, the other of invention. In most specific conjunctures both narratives are relevant, each undermining the other's claim to tell "the whole story," each denying to the other a privileged, Hegelian vision." (1988: 17)

This overview of the debate in the social sciences suggests that the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures is not entirely over the replication or transformation of cultural inventory but complex reflexive processes involved in cultural production, reproduction and innovation in a social context charged with relationships of authority within the culture and the exercise of power at the boundaries between cultures. It questions the adequacy of traditional forms of analysis and suggests that a more comprehensive explanation for identity in minority cultures is possible through the development of a generative model that views culture as constitutive rather than static and knowledge as being socially constructed rather than immutable.

What is being advocated is a synthesis of theoretical perspectives not as a categorical rejection of the dominant theory but in the interests of scholarship that resists favoring one form of analysis over another when each can be supported by empirical evidence. The challenge then is to develop a model using insider categories to explain the contrasting elements of change and stasis,

universality and difference, and struggle and order which often are matters of degree and significance rather than clearly defined factors.

The model for explaining the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures developed in this thesis incorporates the correctives to traditional analysis proposed in the current debate in Anthropology and Sociology. Rather than giving primary attention to the analysis of form, following Barth, the model moves beyond traditional models to discover and explain the processes involved in the development of form (1981: 33). The model is cognizant of the constitutive and emergent nature of culture (Williams, 1981; Clifford, 1986) and the malleable nature of socially constructed knowledge (Harries-Jones, 1985: 240-244). Theoretically and methodologically the model develops an explanation of the struggle for self-definition from the perspective of 'culture-as-experienced' and 'knowledge-in-construction' and therefore makes no particular 'truth' claims as to the finality of the outcomes of social processes.

### **A Generative Model**

The model developed in the thesis is drawn in large part from the direction, if not the substance, of Fredrik Barth's emphasis on generative models to overcome the limitations of traditional approaches. He contends that ,

"Explanation is not achieved by a description of the patterns of regularity, no matter how meticulous and adequate, nor by replacing this description by other abstractions congruent with it, but by what makes the pattern, i.e. certain processes." (1981: 35)

Central to the process identified by Barth is the transactional nature of most interpersonal and social relationships. While he recognizes elements of choice and intentionality based on achieving a desired end result and maximizing values, he returns to a structural approach by assigning transactional rules and essentialist conclusions to the process. Following Goffman (1959), he characterizes the transactional process as impression management, seen as under and over-communication used to maintain agreement in social interactions. He sees the institutionalization of punishment and reward associated with the success or failure of impression management as the incentive for changing values to achieve the optimum outcome in the transactional process which concludes with the assignment of social roles and statuses. What emerges out of Barth's model is the assumption that the transactional process always moves in the direction of social accommodation to maintain cultural boundaries in mutually beneficial ways (Barth, 1981). This linear and functionalist approach to developing a generative model is problematic because it assumes a 'level playing field' for cultural interaction on which each culture's interests are equally well served.

In his critique of "Ethnicity as Practice" by G. Carter Bentley Kevin A. Yelvington draws attention to the overly functionalist nature of Barth's approach. The article identifies several issues that have implications for the refinement of Barth's generative model. Firstly, following Isajiw's development of the dual boundaries of socialization and inter-group relations in culture he concludes that, "internal and external boundaries constantly shift,

and ethnicity has to be constantly redefined and reinvented" in the interface between the two boundaries (1991: 165). Secondly, he identifies the importance of history in the maintenance of cultural identity. He is not referring here to history in the conventional sense but following Ching, "the social construction of primordiality" (Ching quoted in Yelvington, 1991: 165). History is then not only the replication of traditional cultural practices but the reconstitution of the past as part of on-going cultural production. Thirdly, he concludes that identity depends on contrast and interaction with social and cultural others and the power relations existing between them. In this regard he notes the dominant group's inclination to construct and institutionalize 'putative homogeneity' (1991: 163). This latter observation is particularly relevant to understanding the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures.

The model is generative in the sense that it recognizes that cultural forms are the product of continuous social construction. They cannot be narrowly defined as specific static patterns but are contingent on the social processes that create and recreate them. The forms are subject to either simple replication, formal production and reproduction and/or innovation (Williams, 1981: 199-202). Rather than imposing intellectual constructs on the evidence the analysis flows from 'culture as it is being lived'. These are the views traditional explanations have marginalized by progressive over-generalization but are the very perspectives Rosaldo (1990), Williams (1981), Barth (1981), Harries-Jones (1991) and Phillips (1972) insist need to be central to the discourse. By giving voice to these perspectives the validity of the universalistic and



homogenizing emphasis in traditional forms of analysis is tested and kept in perspective.

The other central feature of a generative model is the concept of transactions, but not in the narrow sense of highly structured almost ritualized processes as Barth defines them. The problem with Barth's definition is that it unnecessarily restricts the possible outcome of the transactions to an idealistic return to stasis. The model in the thesis defines transactions more broadly as the process of negotiation that takes place at most levels of social relationships. Negotiations take place within a minority culture as the result of the dialectical process in the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966 & 1969) and what William's concludes "The working-out of the idea of culture is a slow reach again for control." (1960: 295) Externally it involves negotiation not only over cultural boundaries to preserve isolation but, contrary to traditional analysis, to include a flow of personnel across them and often involves extensive social interaction which does not necessarily interfere with the cultural fabric of either group (Barth, 1969).

The model implies no particular necessity to determine specific outcomes for the transactional process as Barth appears compelled to do since that requires a level of over-generalization and abstraction. The principle of generalization in the 'scientific study of human social behavior', and 'the study of humankind' clearly assumes a grounding in experience. As Berger cautions, abstractions are often contradicted by actual social experience. "To date, in any event, socialist societies have exchanged the "alienations" of the

market for the "alienations" of bureaucracy (leaving aside whatever else may be the gains or costs of socialism)." (1977: 73) He is not questioning Marx's analysis or critique of capitalism, only the problem of abstracting the analysis beyond the scope of the sociological enterprise which is grounded in 'human social behavior' and not superficially convincing logical mental predictions.

The model developed in the thesis argues that a number of major intervening variables make it difficult to sustain the hegemony of traditional forms of analysis. Barth identified the factors of choice and intentionality but limited their significance in his definition of transactional processes. Williams makes them a more prominent feature.

"The idea of culture describes our common inquiry, but our conclusions are diverse, as our starting points are diverse. The word, culture, cannot automatically be pressed into service as any kind of social or personal directive. Its emergence, in its modern meanings, marks the effort at total qualitative assessment, but what it indicates is a process, not a conclusion. The arguments which can be grouped under its heading do not point to any inevitable action or affiliation. They define, in a common field, approaches and conclusions. It is left to us to decide which, if any, we shall take up, that will not turn in our hands." (1960: 295)

To this general argument can be added the factors of history or invented tradition, reflexivity, the totality of culture, experience and, more specifically to minority cultures, the interface between internal and external transactions.

In present society the significance of history appears to have been one of the casualties of modernity. Berger and Harries-Jones argue that society has moved in the direction of a future orientation with less reference to the past (Berger, 1977: 73-75; Harries-Jones, 1985: 240). Berger and Rosaldo conclude that this shift has blurred the traditional reference points for identity (Berger, 1977: 71-72;

Rosaldo, 1989:196-217). Others are less pessimistic and argue that those elements of history still available, significant and confirmed in practice, also influence present practice (Yelvington, 1991; Williams, 1981: 204). Conceptually it would seem logical to incorporate both time orientations into the model. To favor one over the other returns the discussion to the production of ideal types. However, the degree to which either of these time orientations influence the transactional processes remains an important consideration.

Missing from Barth's model but important to understanding minority cultures is the role of power. This refers to the formal and informal institutions of authority within the minority culture as well as the dominant culture. In both instances it should not be assumed that the power these exercise is absolute. As Berger and Luckmann (1969) point out the process of socialization is never complete mainly because the process of externalization, objectification, internalization and legitimation is dialectical and dependent on the continuity of experience. It follows that authority structures within a minority culture are as effective as their ability to control and interpret contemporary experience.

Similarly, the power exerted by the dominant culture is qualified by the effectiveness of its ability to control and interpret experience in society as a whole in the context of competing perspectives. Its authority is not unlike that exercised within minority cultures with the exception that the position of dominance usually includes control of the major social institutions and access to coercive measures for implementing its vision of society.

Rosaldo and Berger argue that this analysis is replicated by the hegemony exercised by traditional emphasis on universality and homogenization in the social sciences. They conclude that these are products of the dominant elites' particular interests to the exclusion of other alternatives (Berger, 1977: 79; Rosaldo, 1989: 218-224).

While the dominant culture has the power to circumscribe minority identity because of its status, minority cultures are not entirely powerless to defend their interests in the transactional process. They have access to avenues of direct conflict, active and passive forms of resistance and symbolic strategies to maintain the integrity of their distinct identities. The use of open conflict is rare in western society since the dominant culture possesses the institutional resources to apply coercive measures to ensure compliance if it deems they are necessary. The effectiveness of strategies involving civil disobedience to promote minority interests has been demonstrated by the civil rights and environmental movements in North America.

John Webster Grant (1985) characterizes the passive resistance that frustrates the interests of the dominant culture in aboriginal communities in Canada in the phrase, "The yes that means no." More specifically passive resistance has included retreat from society, subtle victimization of the majority culture<sup>9</sup> and developing a morally superior and therefore superior self-image in minority

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<sup>9</sup> What is referred to here is the minority culture's ability to 'victimize' the dominant culture by withholding their full participation in society and undermining the full exercise of its authority. The process exposes the contradictions between the ideals and practise in society.

cultures (Barrow, 1975; Miller, 1990a). The latter provides the motivation and legitimation for the, "creation and self-recreation of peoples who genuinely stand apart, outside - as well as within." (Sider, 1987: 23) 'Resistance' and 'protest' usually mediate the dominant culture's complete control even though it has the coercive potential to exercise this (Dyck, 1991). These strategies serve to preserve a sense of cultural integrity and dignity for the minority culture and work against total cultural incorporation.

Following Touraine, Harries-Jones argues that linear assumptions about the transactional process are also thwarted by, "a capacity for action by society on itself. Culture can only be interpreted in terms of practice and transformation of practice, which invokes at the same time an image of a society's capacity to act upon itself." (1985: 237) This implies that cultural production involves both cultural behavior and reflexive processes that exist in relation to each other. Cultural production includes reflexive activity that is not entirely dependent on the replication of cultural form. The first aspect of reflexivity has already been introduced as a reflection on the past to discover and apply those historical items that are accessible and significant to the present. In addition the emphasis on the future in modernity, cited earlier, suggests that future expectations also affect the present. More importantly, Williams argues that even though cultures are not fully self-conscious they respond to change as it affects their whole way of life (1960: 313-34). The argument is that the cognitive response to change is shaped by the total cultural experience and must be confirmed by that experience to be internalized. However, the

conscious production and reproduction of culture is not simply processual. "No community, no culture, can ever be fully conscious of itself, ever fully know itself. The growth of consciousness is usually uneven, individual, and tentative in nature" (1960: 334). The gap in self-understanding is described by Foucault as, "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what *what they do does* " (Foucault in Winland, 1990: 151) While accepting the substance of both Williams and Foucault's statements I would argue that the level of self-consciousness in minority cultures is strengthened by the contrast and/or conflict relationship in which it exists with the dominant culture. It heightens the significance of the elements of intentionality and choice since their identity is constantly questioned against the background of the dominant culture.

The model resists arriving at definitive conclusions in the way that traditional analysis does about cultural forms. In its place it suggests a variety of possible responses which have no measure of finality attached to them. The assumption is that the outcomes are tentative and feed back into the continuing transactional processes as either a confirmation or redefinition of positions taken within and/or between cultures. This does not mean that new definable cultural forms do not emerge. Quite to the contrary. The model suggests that change is constant and often transformational. It asserts that since reality is a product of social construction the primary importance given to cultural form in traditional analysis cannot be sustained and must give place to other forms of analysis that are grounded in everyday life rather than abstract intellectual

constructs. The following tables illustrate the contrast between traditional and generative models.

**Table 1. A Traditional Model of Cultural Homogenization**

UNSTABLE FORMS		STABLE FORM	
Dominant Culture	Accommodation	Behavioral Assimilation	Structural Assimilation
Minority Culture	Acculturation		
= Segregation		>	

**Table 2. A Generative Model of Cultural Transactions**

TRANSACTIONAL PROCESSES-1	POTENTIAL OUTCOMES-2
<p>The diagram shows a central vertical flow of three diamond-shaped boxes labeled '(Minority Culture)'. To the left, a box labeled '(Dominant Culture)' has an arrow pointing towards the top minority box. The top minority box has an arrow pointing back to the dominant culture box. The top and middle minority boxes are connected by a downward arrow. The middle and bottom minority boxes are connected by a downward arrow. The bottom minority box has an arrow pointing back to the top minority box.</p>	<p>Conflict Resistance (active &amp; passive) Reinvention Redefinition Segregation (voluntary &amp; involuntary) Accommodation Behavioral Assimilation</p>
=	Structural Assimilation-3

1-The transactional processes involve a range of factors over which negotiation takes place. Driedger has identified territory, institutions, and culture as structural items and history, ideology and authority as particularly important to minority identification (Driedger & Harder ed., 1990: 171-175). As a socio-religious group Mennonite identity includes sectarian status as well. The process is influenced by intentionality, choice, race, power, class and modernity. The arrows refer to the reflexive activity involved in the transactional processes.

2-The outcomes with the exception of structural assimilation are considered a reorganization of the transactional processes and have no finality attached to them.

3-Structural assimilation refers to total cultural incorporation in which case the transactional process becomes redundant. Gordon concludes that in America the main form of assimilation is behavioral with little evidence of structural assimilation (Gordon, 1970: 94). He sees more evidence of structural assimilation occurring between minority cultures. He suggests that Anglo conformity persists despite the failure of a melting pot ideology and an official policy of cultural pluralism.

The generative model's emphasis on the transactional nature of the relationship between cultures has implications for explaining identity in minority cultures. The model characterizes minority

identities as definable episodes of transformation which are the product of group choices and intentionality, 'invented tradition', power and authority structures, the continuous need to legitimate the minority identity internally, complexes of transactions involving internal socialization and external negotiation involving other minority cultures and the dominant culture and reflexivity influencing the entire process. It follows that culturally distinct groups are involved in a continuous process of creation, maintenance and legitimation of cultural boundaries and caught between potential cultural incorporation and cultural transformation.

## **Methodology**

The material to be analyzed by applying the generative model developed in the thesis comes from applying ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches to the General Conference Mennonites in British Columbia's struggle for self-definition. The historical material to be included in the study will come from translations and analysis of original Anabaptist texts. The research process was facilitated by the heavy concentration of General Conference Mennonites in the Lower Mainland of B.C. Observation included attendance at services in one of the thirty-one General Conference churches each week and participation in events such as regional conferences, songfests, workshops and seminars. The eight life histories included in the study summarized in Appendix C come from published, unpublished and oral sources. The non directed interviews listed in Appendix A included twenty-seven persons representing a cross-section of leaders, genders, lay persons, age



groups, urban/rural distribution, the three major waves of Mennonite migrations to Canada and a recent influx of refugees from Southeast Asia. Subjects for the specific interviews listed in Appendix B were selected on the basis of their ability to speak to queries remaining from the initial interviews.

The sample, with the exception of several of the participants in the specific interviews, was limited to members of General Conference churches in B.C. and chosen by a method of webbing guided by Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry Jr's (1989) emergent design methodology. This served as the general methodological approach used in data collection and analysis because of its compatibility with the theoretical orientation of the thesis. In contrast to traditional approaches which assume that the researcher understands the phenomenon so that hypotheses, data collection and analysis can be planned in advance they recommend following Glaser (1967), a constant comparative method in which

"researchers build an understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs *in situ*, later testing the veracity of that understanding, also *in situ*. The first step is to observe and record the phenomenon in detail. Researchers then specify their understanding and construct guidelines for further data collection to test the emerging understanding. . . . The process continues until conceptual categories are saturated and reach a point of redundancy, making further data collection unnecessary." (Belk et. al., 1989: 3)

The web of subjects grows as the data base expands and as the critical issues to be tested are identified and refined. In this way the research is guided by emerging consensus in the data. This method differs from conventional research by allowing the hypothesis and analysis to emerge out of the social context itself rather than a tightly scripted research plan. This means that initially the interviews are non directive and only later become

semi-structured as the subjects' own categories for analysis emerge. Only as the research process reaches conclusion do they become more specific as the results are tested for generalizability. Otherwise emergent design shares the same rigorous demands of purposive sampling and triangulation to validate its conclusions. The following table summarizes the approach taken.

**Table 3. Emergent Design/Webbing**

Level I Analysis	Level I Research	Level II Analysis	Level II Research	Level III Analysis	Level III Research	Level IV Analysis
Popular Identities	Armchair	Armchair	Archives Interviews(27)	Summarizing	Specific Interviews	Conclusions
Closed Community	Library Research	Identity Factors	Subjects Gender		MB/GC relations Leadership Historicism	
Religious Sect	Participant Observation	Structural -Territory -Institutions	Leaders Laypersons	Closed to open Critical mass		
Conservative	Life Histories (8)	-Culture	Generational	Invisible Culture		
Conscientious Objectors		Symbolic -History -Ideology -Leadership	20-35 36-55 56-	Asset or liability Anabaptism/Evangelicalism Lay/Professional		
Agricultural Community		Sectarianism	Kanadier Russlaender Refugees 1 Refugees 2			

Emergent design lends itself to using an inductive approach to the research. Initial categories for analysis were taken from popular characterizations of Mennonites in B.C. The veracity of these characterizations was tested by observation, life histories and a review of the Mennonite literature. At this stage observations were very general and focused on identifying the critical issues currently affecting the group. The initial literature review focused

on developing a historical background against which the observations and life histories could be understood. The sociology of religion and particularly the collected works of Bryan Wilson were reviewed because Mennonites are commonly described as a religious sect. A computer database was developed to organize all of the information collected.

The five published and unpublished life histories or fragments representing two *Russlaender*, two WWII refugees and one Vietnamese refugee were supplemented with recorded oral accounts of a second generation *Kanadier* Mennonite who came as an economic migrant from Manitoba, a single woman representing the disproportionate number of women in the group during the 1950s, and one third and one fourth generation Canadian Mennonite. The primary approach used to outline and analyze these biographies and autobiographies was Mandelbaum's (1973) suggestion of looking at the dimensions, turnings and adaptations in life histories.

By dimensions Mandelbaum is referring to the biological (genetic constitution), cultural (more a schematic outline of mutual expectations, understandings and behavior patterns than a detailed code), social (the interplay of real relations) and psychological (the individual's subjective world, feelings, attitudes) that are linked in their effect on subsequent actions. Turnings are described as the major transitions in a person's life. These are significant since the person, "takes on a new set of roles, enters into fresh relations with a new set of people, and acquires a new self-conception. The turning thus combines elements of three dimensions, and the new role being mainly cultural, the new interactions being social and the new self-

conception being psychological." (1973: 181) Finally, Mandelbaum holds that life involves adaptation to changing environmental, physical and social conditions to maintain continuity of social participation, social expectation, self image or simple survival.

A further insight into understanding life histories is Spradley's analysis of James Sewid's life. Sewid, from Alert Bay, responded to cultural conflict with the dominant culture by becoming bicultural. During his lifetime he remained rooted in his native tradition while adapting European influences, he practiced Christianity and potlatching without conflict, accepted a traditional leadership role assigned at birth and was a successful entrepreneur. Contrary to acculturation theory, "He was somehow able to comprehend, reconcile, and recombine the different cultural concepts involved." (1969: 283)

While the life histories could not be analyzed in detail in a thesis of this length it should be noted here that the process of superimposing Mandelbaum's framework and Spradley's insight onto the eight life histories identified the primary preoccupation with issues of identity, struggle and minority culture among General Conference Mennonites in B.C. that is similar to my observations in aboriginal communities. What emerged out of the initial exercise was a series of questions about the adequacy of sectarian and secularization theory based primarily on classification of form and emphasis on discontinuity to explain identity in minority cultures. This understanding provided the focus for the thesis and initial direction to the theoretical orientation developed at the beginning of the chapter.

The second stage of the research process included twenty-seven non directed interviews, one week of archival research in the British Columbia Archives and two weeks in the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. Primary attention was given to the interview material with the archival research applied to help in understanding the subjects own frame of reference.

The research at the British Columbia Archives centered on legislation specific to Mennonite settlement in B.C. In addition the search analyzed the public press to understand public attitudes and reactions to the implementation of public policy. The Mennonite Heritage Centre research had a broader focus. Particular attention was given to Mennonite history in Canada and the first three waves of Mennonite emigration. In this regard the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records provided detailed data on the second and third waves of immigration. Secondly, the private papers of Mennonites involved in B.C. were read to understand the issues affecting the organization of General Conference Mennonites in B.C. Finally, the major Mennonite periodicals provided first hand accounts of Mennonite experience in B.C.

Once the subjects had been identified they were informed of the preliminary understandings arrived at from archival research and asked to participate in an interview usually planned for a week later. The reason for delaying the interview was to give the subjects time to reflect on the topic beforehand. The interviews followed a similar pattern in that I limited my participation to active listening to ensure clarity. The struggle for self-definition

which dominated the life histories also proved central in the undirected general interviews.

The data collected from all sources was organized using Driedger's three structural (territory, institutions, culture) and three symbolic (historical symbols, ideology, authority) minority identification factors (1990: 171-175) as well as identification with sectarianism as developed by Wilson. Driedger argues that the factors, "tend to reinforce each other, so that when individuals of a given ethnic group identify with their in-group along these dimensions, they tend to remain distinctive, . . . ." (1990: 173). A sect is defined by Wilson,

"as a protest group, [which] has always developed its own distinctive ethic, belief and practices, against the background of the wider society; its own protest is conditioned by the economic, social, ideological and religious circumstances prevailing at the time of its emergence and development." (1961: 1)

This definition has direct bearing on the thesis since sects, the most common form of minority culture in western society, are clearly identified by specific "responses to the world" (1982: 103).

The organization of the material along these lines reinforced the earlier significance of struggle for self-definition and revealed less internal homogeneity than originally expected. What emerged were a series of critical issues currently being debated within the group and a variety of responses to the influence of the dominant society. Particular to General Conference Mennonites in B.C. were their relationships to co-religionist groups in the province. These emerging understandings confirmed the need to develop an actional model for explaining the phenomenon. This prompted a further review of theory and resulted in the generative model developed in

the beginning of the chapter. The final stages of the research process involved conducting specific interviews to fill gaps in the data. It also served as a test of the veracity of the model and the form of analysis that emerged out of the empirical data.

## CHAPTER 3 - HISTORICAL PATTERNS OF TRANSFORMATION

"Where, however, the rulers command and act against God, there one must leave their command undone, and obey God rather than man. For the conscience has been set free and is reserved for God alone, that he and no human being may be Lord of the same and ruler over, teach and direct it whithersoever it pleases him. Therefore wherever the government presumes to lay hands upon the conscience and to control the faith of man, there it is robbing God of what is his. Therefore it is wrong to obey it in this" (Peter Riedeman (1542) in Klaassen, 1981: 258).

In chapter two the thesis developed a theoretical model for understanding the transactional and reflexive nature of cultural relations with particular reference to the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures. This chapter presents an outline of Anabaptist origins and their Mennonite successors to analyze several definable changes in cultural form in their four hundred and sixty-eight year history. Special attention will be given to the Dutch/Prussian/Russian tradition out of which most General Conference Mennonites in B.C. come. Most noteworthy are the transformations from radical urban and village reformers (1525-1618), to quietist isolated rural communities (16th-18th century), semi-autonomous agricultural 'commonwealths' (1789-1917), frontier farmers in America (1659-1950), a social pariah (1918-1948) and more recently in B.C. into a partially integrated cultural minority in British Columbia (1949-present).

### **Anabaptist Origins: From Reformers to Quietist Communities**

Present day Mennonites originated during the religious, political, social and economic ferment of sixteenth century Europe. This was a period of growing anticlericalism and open revolt against the repressive feudal structure of society which was maintained by



the combined authority and coercive power of the church and princes. This union was natural since monasteries and cathedral chapters were also major landlords. In the region between Ulm and Augsburg, for example, 45% of the peasants had clerical and 37% aristocratic landlords (Stayer, 1991: 36). Stayer characterizes the monasteries in Upper Swabia as no ordinary landlords,

"to an extent that set them apart from lay lords, they squeezed the peasants financially, expropriated them for debt, attacked their heritable tenure, and reduced them to serfdom. The monasteries . . . were simply more zealous and efficient in the arts of financial management." (1991: 37).

As a result political, social, economic and religious elements merged into a growing crisis in European society.

The two main developments in sixteenth century Europe that had direct bearing on the crisis in feudalism and subsequently Anabaptist origins were the Protestant Reformation and the German Peasants' War. Blickle relates these to a broader movement in history defined as 'The Revolution of the Common Man' (Blickle, 1981: 187-193).

While Martin Luther, the leading figure in the Protestant Reformation in Germany, was opposed to the aspirations of the Peasants' War he helped to develop and strengthen its platform. He provided the legitimation of the common man's appeal to the supremacy of 'godly law' as the foundation for social order (Blickle, 1981: xxiii). Luther had successfully used this principle to develop a two kingdom theology and break the hold of the magisterial and ecclesiastical law on the church. The Bible was to serve as the supreme authority. However his reform did not extend to changing the structure of society itself. In Zurich the reformer Zwingli was

only partially successful in advocating that the state also be governed by 'godly law'.

The Peasants' War took this principle to its ultimate conclusion and developed a comprehensive program of political, social, economic and religious reform. Their position was contained in 'The Twelve Articles' which were argued on the principle of 'godly law' and supported by reference to scripture.<sup>10</sup> The Articles provided the platform the peasants hoped to use as the basis for negotiating a more egalitarian form of society. They backed up their position with a general strike which mobilized commoners against the ruling class. They did dismantle several fortresses and sacked monasteries but for the most part restricted their activity to attempting to resolve their grievances by negotiation and passive resistance (Stayer, 1991: 21). In the spring of 1525 the princes launched a counter offensive and quickly wiped out the resistance with their well trained and disciplined armies. However, the movement had an effect on the princes who instituted reforms of their own to allow for peasant representation in government and more control in local affairs. This princely takeover of the reform fell well short of the communitarian goals of the 'Revolution of the

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<sup>10</sup> The full title of this document is "The Twelve Articles: The Just and Fundamental Articles of all the Peasantry and Tenants of Spiritual and Temporal Powers by Whom they Think Themselves Oppressed." The preamble reads in part

"First of all, the Gospel does not cause rebellions and uproars, because it tells of Christ, the promised Messiah, whose words and life teach nothing but love, peace, patience, and unity. And all who believe in this Christ become loving, peaceful, patient, and one in the spirit. . . .

Second, it surely follows that the peasants, whose articles demand this gospel as their doctrine and rule of life, cannot be called "disobedient" or "rebellious." For if God deigns to hear the peasant's earnest plea that they may be permitted to live according to his word, who will dare deny his will? Who indeed will dare question his judgment? (Blickle, 1981: 195-196)

Common Man.' The call for comprehensive social reform continued but never again surfaced as a mass movement.

During and following the Peasants' War numerous scattered groups appeared with a similar communitarian response to the crisis in feudalism. This was not a single movement but

"since most of them made adult baptism the center of their creed, they came all to be called by the comprehensive name of Anabaptists-re-baptisers. . . . No distinction was made between those who held that God's cause demanded violence and the much larger number who believed in meekness and suffering" (Elton, 1963: 164).

A total of thirty such groups have been identified in Switzerland and southern Germany (Clasen, 1972a: 256-257). Another six to eight groups emerged in Northern Europe and several in Northern Italy. Unlike the Protestant reformers such as Luther and Zwingli the Anabaptists insisted on the total freedom of conscience in belief and practice. The main features of the Schleitheim (1527) and the Dordrecht (1685) Confessions of the early Anabaptists included a believer's church, adult baptism, non-conformity, non-resistance, non-swearing of oaths, discipleship, *Gelassenheit*,<sup>11</sup> the community of goods and church discipline (the ban). To the ecclesiastical and civil authorities who had successfully put down the Peasants' revolt with armed force, the Anabaptists' communitarian position presented a renewed threat to the social order. Their fears were not

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<sup>11</sup> *Gelassenheit* refers to yieldedness or resignation to God's will, and may include abandonment of the self and a readiness to suffer as a result of this resolve. It originated in thirteenth century mysticism and surfaced again in the sixteenth century among the Anabaptists who gave it a more active connotation. *Gelassenheit* became the underlying principle for ethical action in the practise of unconditional love. Later it was redefined, under the influence of Pietism, closer to the passive mystical sense as quiet confidence and denotes a separation and aloofness from the turmoil and reality in everyday life as the person strives for unity with God. (Klaassen, undated; Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 2: 448-449)

totally unfounded as the movement grew dramatically between 1525 and 1618 (Clasen, 1978) and questioned the nature of the existing social and institutional arrangements. Particularly after one group led by Jan van Leyden took over the city of Muenster (1534-35) by force Anabaptists were characterized as the criminal left wing of the reformation and systematically persecuted, driven underground or into exile, and executed through the combined efforts of the church and state in both Protestant and Catholic regions of Europe. In the Catholic regions Anabaptists were sentenced to death even if they recanted. The mode of execution then was changed from burning at the stake to beheading. Women were usually drowned. In the Protestant regions the usual punishment was total banishment (Clasen, 1972a: 420-421). The systematic persecution forced these disparate and often hostile groups to accept each other as coreligionists but there is little evidence that this led to consolidation into a unified movement.

In one sense Blicke was correct in concluding that the Anabaptist movement "sought to save a remnant of the communal Reformation by withdrawing from the realm of this world; but the rulers mercilessly exterminated them." (Blicke, 1981: 185) Certainly the threat to the existing structure of society had been effectively averted. Persecution had kept the movement small, scattered and preoccupied with survival needs. Its potential for reforming society had been completely drained. As a movement its major flaw was that even though they recognized their common purpose the independent Anabaptist groups never consolidated into a single unified movement. This made the authorities' efforts to

neutralize their threat all the more easy and effective. However, it did not spell the end of the movement as such. Once the persecutions subsided the surviving remnants in Europe cultivated the Anabaptist tenets and chose to continue as relatively invisible minorities. The Anabaptist refugees from Switzerland and South Germany, Central Germany and Holland and North Germany settled into quietist rural enclaves in Pennsylvania, Moravia and Prussia respectively in an attempt to create communities in which the rule of 'godly law' would prevail.

Of particular interest to the thesis is the Prussian experience and the subsequent emigration to Southern Russia and finally to Canada. Benjamin H. Unruh states that Prussia was a preferred destination for Anabaptist refugees from all over Europe as early as 1527 because of the degree of religious tolerance afforded by the regime of Count Edward (1955: 36). This was important to the Anabaptists because they placed paramount value on complete autonomy in the exercise of their beliefs (1955: 37). Though there remained a lingering suspicion of these radicals in Prussian society this was initially not a problem since the Mennonites settled in isolated communities that did not interfere with Prussian society. Here the "Mennonites kept their religion, customs, and language unadulterated." (Belk, 1976: 32)

Even though Frederick the Great reaffirmed Mennonite freedom and autonomy in religious matters when he united east and west Prussia in 1772, the rapid expansion of Mennonite land holdings threatened both the state and the dominant Lutheran church. Since the Lutheran church received taxes from Lutheran held territory,

Mennonite expansion meant a loss of revenue. This also had an effect on the state as conscription for the army and war taxes were restricted to landholders with the exception of Mennonites who had received total exemption from military service. This situation resulted in a series of orders restricting Mennonite freedoms and expansion that produced the preconditions for another migration.

In 1774 Mennonites were ordered to pay 5000 thaler in lieu of military service, a practice they agreed to only reluctantly. At the end of the eighteenth century they were compelled to pay tithes on land purchased from Lutherans and in 1801 were forbidden to purchase land from Lutherans altogether. These restrictions were accompanied by minor irritations such as withholding citizenship, restricting public funerals, the payment of tribute and the boycotting and intimidation of Mennonite merchants (Belk, 1976: 34-35).

The community itself was still divided into autonomous churches roughly falling into the traditional Frisian and Flemish factions and lacked the institutional structures to effectively protect their interests in the face of a powerful majority. Their immediate circumstances were tolerable even if restricted, but the long term future lacked the agricultural opportunities and religious liberty their way of life depended on. Minority status became a liability in Prussia and the continuity of the Mennonite way of life was seriously threatened.

## **Mennonites in Exile: from Exile to Socio-religious Culture**

The opportunity to emigrate came when Catherine II of Russia entered into an agreement with the Prussian Mennonites in 1787<sup>12</sup>, on terms that held the promise of the establishment of a "theocratic Mennonite commonwealth" (Giesinger, 1974: 183). Mennonites were promised land for their exclusive use, religious freedom, total exemption from military service and the right to form their own local government. The following year 228 families, many of whom were impoverished and landless, arrived and founded the Chortitza Colony in the Southern Ukraine. They were followed by an estimated 10,000 others in the following 60 years (Epp, 1974: 49). In 1803 the Malotschna Colony was formed 100 miles further east but could not satisfy the insatiable need for land so that additional colonies were added in eastern Russia and Siberia. The original land grant of 280,000 acres grew to 3,750,000 between the years 1789 and 1914 (Belk, 1976: 36). Despite these favorable conditions the realization of a true theocratic state eluded them because of persistent factionalism, the inability to balance ecclesiastical and civil authority, the rise of class divisions, the withdrawal of privileges by the Russian government and finally, the Bolshevik revolution.

Attempts to resolve the dispute between the Flemish and Frisian groups prior to their emigration from Prussia had failed. In fact their differences became even more accentuated in the Russian context. Giesinger documents the presence of seven distinct groups by 1824 (1974: 185-186). By 1860 this had grown to ten

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12 A summary of Imperial Charter of Privileges is given in Appendix D. It included land grants, tax exemptions, local autonomy and exemption from military service.

independent Mennonite congregations (1974: 187). Among the more outstanding of these congregations were the *Kleine Gemeinde*<sup>13</sup> an ultra conservative group under Klaas Riemer and the Mennonite Brethren who had come under the influence of Lutheran Pietists and German Baptists. The remaining congregations were more uniform and were collectively referred to as *Kirchliche* but represented a variety of independent congregational groups without a central institutional authority.

The Russian government was not particularly concerned with the internal religious squabbles of the Mennonites. Their interest was in developing the agricultural potential of the Ukraine which they had recently wrested away from the Turks. Mennonites were among the model farmers the government invited to achieve this goal. The Russian government's primary concern was with civil organization which administered the law and local economy. Each village had an elected resident *Schulz* who was responsible to an *Oberschulz* who was elected by all the villages in a particular settlement. These persons made up an administrative council that related to the imperial government (Giesinger, 1974: 37).

While this arrangement suited the Mennonite principle of the separation of church and state it was plagued with problems since the membership in each was the same.

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<sup>13</sup> Klaas Reimer came to Southern Russia from Danzig with thirty of his members and settled in the Malotschna Colony in 1805. Reimer judged the church life in the Colony as being too lax and kept his group separate and practiced a more severe church life and discipline. When the local authorities refused to accept the group the Russian government incorporated them by decree to give them legal status. *Kleine Gemeinde* (small church) was a derogatory name given them to set them off from the *Kirchliche* form of church which was considered the *Grosse Gemeinde* (large church). The group migrated to Canada in 1874 and is presently called the Evangelical Mennonite Church (Canada).



"In the early years the local government leaders, who came from the more worldly, the more secular-minded of the group, often clashed with the religious leaders, sometimes so seriously as to lead to their excommunication. Later on the religious leaders, usually themselves members of the propertied class who controlled the local government, sometimes worked too closely with the secular leaders, compromising their principles for worldly ends" (1974: 183).

The civil authority developed a more stable and unified organizational structure than the church was able to. This meant that at critical points it was better equipped to act decisively and effectively represent the Mennonite community as a whole. As long as the 'commonwealth' prospered the civil authority dominated the status quo. This situation developed into an acute problem when a large landless and poor class began to emerge among the Mennonites and began to drain local economies. While the community attempted to accommodate everyone's needs for land the development of daughter colonies could not keep pace with rapid growth of the population.

The Russian period has been described as a 'Golden Era'<sup>14</sup> in Mennonite history because of its achievements in agriculture, education, mutual aid and art. Though the institutional, economic and cultural progress was monumental it resulted in a socio-religious commonwealth rather than a theocratic one based on the early Anabaptist insistence on the supremacy of 'godly law.'

The Mennonite separation into closed communities proved a boon to their social and economic development but also contributed

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<sup>14</sup> This was the theme of a Dueck Films production entitled "And When They Shall Ask." The Russian period is portrayed as a high point in Mennonite history. It also portrayed the survival of a Mennonite identity in the Soviet Union as evidence of the enduring quality of the tradition.

to their ultimate demise in Russia. Their isolation from Russian culture clearly identified them as a minority. In 1870 one of their most cherished *Privelegium* was removed. The government at St. Petersburg introduced compulsory military service for all classes. This prompted the Mennonites to put aside their internal differences and make joint representation to have their exemption reaffirmed. The negotiations lasted ten years and produced a compromise allowing Mennonites to complete their service in reforestation projects (Epp, 1974: 185-6; Giesinger, 1974: 192-3). This issue combined with programs of Russification affecting education and the distribution of land, and a growing resentment of foreigners on Russian soil convinced 17,000 Mennonites to emigrate.

The remaining 100,000 Mennonites accepted the concessions required for them to remain in Russia. They agreed to perform alternate military service and conceded their autonomy in education and civil authority (Belk, 1976: 44). The main colonies of Chortitza and Malotschna continued to expand both culturally and economically till 1917 despite the new restrictions.

The Bolshevik revolution dealt harshly with Mennonite villages partly due to their status as a German minority but mainly because they were identified with the bourgeoisie. Mennonite attempts to protect themselves during the period of anarchy and civil war that followed WWI proved futile. Village life was irretrievably shattered as it was quickly brought under Soviet control. Total disaster was only averted by the efforts of Mennonites in America who sent relief to victims of the famine that engulfed all of southern Russia (Schroeder, 1974: 201-218). The rapid elimination of Mennonite

institutions by the new government and a deteriorating agricultural economy precipitated desperate efforts to emigrate. To remain meant being swept into an uncertain future under a hostile regime. 20,201 Mennonites managed to leave before the Soviet borders were sealed in 1930 (Epp, 1982: 178).

However, the harshest treatment was reserved for the Mennonites who remained in Russia. The first economic plan instituted in 1928 began the task of forcibly collectivizing all the Mennonite villages. Institutions (churches, schools, village government) and private businesses were nationalized. Private properties were confiscated and merged into large collective farms and the residents organized into work brigades under strict party supervision. Landholders and clergy were systematically eliminated either by refusing to issue them work permits or more commonly sentencing them to labor camps in Siberia. In the Chortitza settlement alone 1,456 Mennonites of a total of 13,965 suffered this fate between 1929 and 1941 (Mennonite Encyclopedia, Volume IV: 392). George K. Epp estimates that by 1940 50% of the Mennonite households in Russia were single parent families usually headed by women (Epp, undated: 4). Though the earlier efforts at establishing an autonomous theocratic state had failed, now even the potential had been eliminated and the dream had been driven underground.

### **Mennonites in Canada: in Search of Utopia**

The first wave of Mennonite migration to Canada and the U.S.A. involved about one third of all Mennonites in Russia and continued after 1880 at a slower pace until in the aftermath of WWI, the

Bolshevik revolution intervened. Between 1874 and 1880 16,931 Russian Mennonites emigrated to America (Epp, 1974: 200). This included the total *Kleine Gemeinde* and the Hutterite Colonies which had come under the wing of Russian Mennonite administration in 1842 (Giesinger, 1974: 194). Most of the first group came from the poorer daughter settlements of Bergthal and Fuerstenland that had been set up on rented land to accommodate the landless in the main colonies. When Mennonites arrived in Canada beginning in 1874 they did so under difficult but promising conditions. The Canadian government sponsored their travel to Manitoba and extended similar concessions as the Prussian Mennonites had received from Catherine II a century earlier.<sup>15</sup>

Their inability to shed their fractious past and insistence on closed community life soon caught up with them as it had in the past. While the government respected their autonomy in the early years the gradual erosion of the original promises began during WWI. There was a resentment in the host culture of the exemption from military service Mennonites had received. In a 1919 Order in Council dated June 9, 1919, Mennonite entry into Canada was prohibited because they were,

"deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of living and methods of holding property and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated or to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship within a reasonable time after their entry" (Vide Canada Gazette, vol. 52: 3824).

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<sup>15</sup> The full text of the Canadian Charter passed by Order in Council August 13, 1873 is given in Appendix E. It offers essentially the same conditions as the Imperial Charter. It attracted mainly Mennonites who were either landless or living on rented land. The Canadian Charter promised conditions no longer available to them in Russia.

Shortly thereafter their right to separate schools was removed and Mennonites were forced into adopting a municipal form of local government. Splinter groups developed in response to the erosion of the original promises made by the Canadian government. The *Fuerstenlaender*<sup>16</sup> or Old Colonists reacted most strongly. Among the *Bergthal* group the conservatives formed the *Chortizer* and *Sommerfelder* congregations and the less traditionally minded retained the *Bergthaler* name (Pannabecker, 1975: 95).

The more conservative groups resisted the changes by retaining the traditional village authority structures and several were jailed for refusing to send their children to public schools (Francis, 1950: 316-318). Their suspicions of the government's motives were justified. The express purpose of public education was that, "all children of school age were to be indoctrinated with Anglo-Canadian ideals and imbued with Anglo-Canadian culture" (1950: 322). In the end the more conservative groups in Manitoba and Saskatchewan liquidated their holdings and left for Mexico where they had received promises similar to those Canada had extended earlier. However, the majority was not deterred by public criticism. The more progressive Mennonites accepted the need for change. For example H.H. Ewert, an educated Mennonite originally from Kansas, assisted the government in improving the educational standards in Mennonite schools and *Aeltester* David Toews, in

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<sup>16</sup> The 1874 migration to Canada was dominated by persons from the *Fuerstenlaender* and *Bergthal* Colonies in Russia. They arrived as complete communities and established separate villages. The divisions noted have remained independent to the present with the exception of the *Bergthaler* Church which joined the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1960.

Saskatchewan, cultivated a personal friendship with the Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie-King.

The vacant villages created by the migration to Mexico soon filled again after the prohibition on Mennonite emigration was lifted. A second wave of emigration from Russia between 1923 and 1930 was made possible by a series of loans and guarantees made by the Mennonites already in Canada. The entire Mennonite community underwrote a loan totaling \$1,924,727 and gave assurances the new immigrants would not become a burden to the public purse (Epp, 1982: 384). In total 20,201 Mennonites emigrated to Canada under this formal agreement between the C.P.R. and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (1982: 178).

Unlike the earlier emigration in which villages had moved *en masse* sponsored by the Canadian government on favorable terms, this group came at Mennonite expense, under chaotic circumstances and with an entirely different composition. The new immigrants consisted of independent family groups taken mainly from the land owning class from all over Russia. Among them were the educated and moneyed elite that had felt most vulnerable after the Bolshevik revolution. Since most of them had come on credit they began life in Canada poor and in debt at a time when agriculture was in serious decline. Nevertheless, the majority survived the depression years and were absorbed into the Mennonite agricultural communities on the prairies. To supplement farm income many sent their young women into the cities to work as domestics. Farm failures were common during the late 1920s and 1930s especially among the new immigrants who had taken up farms on 'Mennonite terms.' These

terms allowed them to purchase complete farming units without cash and half-crop payments at 6% interest and a maximum term of fifteen years (1982: 202). When even these terms failed a number turned to B.C. which had a mild climate that was similar to that of the Southern Russian steppes and the promise of cheap land to attempt a new beginning.

WWII presented difficulties both within the Mennonite community and with the dominant culture. The first Mennonite immigrants known as *Kanadier* insisted on total exemption from military service based on guarantees made to them in the 1873 Order in Council. The twenties immigrants labeled *Russlaender*, were inclined to negotiate alternate service in *lieu* of military service as they had done in Russia. The Government rejected the *Kanadier* option entirely but after protracted negotiations agreed to alternate service for the conscientious objector class provided for in the 1868 Militia Act, section 17.2. Tribunals decided on individual eligibility and assigned those that passed to forestry projects and various government institutions (Fransen, 1987).

The *Kanadier* Mennonites viewed alternate service as a compromise but went along reluctantly. The option proved controversial for the *Russlaender* Mennonites as well. Among them were persons who had taken up arms either in the *Selbstschutz*<sup>17</sup> or

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<sup>17</sup> For a short period during the Russian revolution Mennonites organized a self-defence force to protect their properties from roving anarchist bands led by Nestor Machno. For most of the revolution Machno was allied with the red army but was forced into exile once the Bolshevich government gained control of the Southern Ukraine. The *Selbstschutz* proved ineffective and was soon disbanded. The issue was contentious within the group since villages which had participated in the force were targeted for mass executions. In a number of villages every male over sixteen was executed.

White army during the period of anarchy and civil war in Russia. Others felt a sense of duty to their new homeland and did not resist the draft.

It was not until WWII that Mennonites in Russia were once again on the move. In anticipation of the German invasion of the Ukraine the Malotschna colony and part of the Chortitza colony were evacuated eastward by the Russian army. For two years the Mennonite settlements in southern Russia were occupied by Germany. When the tide of the war turned in favor of the allies the remaining Mennonites along with others of German origin in occupied Russia, were evacuated ostensibly to be resettled in Poland. In total thirty-five thousand Mennonites made the trek westward. Twenty-three thousand of these were repatriated under the Yalta Agreement and interned in work camps in Siberia. The remaining 12,000 stayed in western Europe in hopes of emigrating (Epp, undated: 9). Between 1947 and 1950 6,153 of these came to Canada with the assistance of the Mennonite Central Committee and the sponsorship of relatives who had preceded them in earlier migrations (J.J. Thiessen to C. Lehn May 24, 1950).

This third wave of Mennonite emigration was made up of remnants of families and villages determined to avoid repatriation to Russia. For example, of the original 614 Mennonites evacuated from Nieder-Chortitza in 1943 only 33 managed to escape to Holland and eventually resettle in Canada and Paraguay (Dyck & Dyck, 1991: 97). A random sample of 336 post war Mennonite immigrants taken from the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records reveals that of the 85 family units represented 4.7% were families without



children, 30.6% families with children and both parents and 64.7% were single parent families. 35.4% were male and 64.6% were female. This imbalance between men and women was already present in the villages prior to WWII as was noted earlier, but became even more pronounced as men became separated from their families during transit, the induction of Mennonite men into the German army and the allied program for the repatriation of refugees after the war (Neufeld, 1981). This group had been stripped of much of the idealism that characterized earlier migrations. Canada became a place of refuge in which it again was possible to dream of a future for themselves and their children. To achieve this they again turned to the strength and security of the Mennonite community.

Fifty years later a fourth wave of emigration to Canada occurred that has implications for the General Conference Mennonites in B.C. On March 5, 1979 MCC Canada on the initiative of Steven Lee, himself a refugee from mainland China with ties to Mennonites in Hong Kong and America, signed an agreement with the Canadian Federal Government for the implementation of a Refugee Sponsorship Program. The main concern was the growing Southeast Asian refugee problem MCC was already addressing in its international aid efforts. Between 1979 and 1988 1243 refugees came to B.C. under this program with 90% coming from southeast Asia (Lescheid, 1989: 136). Many of these passed through the Refugee Resettlement Centre operated out of the Vancouver Chinese Mennonite Church pastored by Steven Lee. Christians among these refugees make up the core members of the four General Conference

Chinese Mennonite Congregations in B.C. One of these churches has also become home to a number of more recent immigrants from Hong Kong.

In recent years an increasing number of Central American refugees have been processed through the Refugee Resettlement Program. Some of these have joined a Spanish group in the Vancouver First United Mennonite Church. While the Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian and Spanish do not share, the heritage of the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement, they share a common religious orientation and have a similar vision of Canada as the country in which their individual and collective futures can be realized without interference.

### **Mennonites in B.C.: Confronting Pariah Status**

Around the turn of the century Mennonites began trickling into the province from the prairie provinces. At first they arrived as individual persons or families and were reported in Nakusp, Nelson and Vancouver. The first recorded group settlement was at Renatta on the Arrow Lakes. In 1907 Frank Siemens, a Mennonite from Altona, Manitoba representing the Western Land Company attracted twenty families from Rosthern and Swift Current, Saskatchewan and Southern Manitoba to take up land in the area (Lehn, 1990: 6; Warkentin et. al., 1965: 7). Because the community had a limited land base and was accessible only by ferry it stayed relatively small and went virtually unnoticed.

The 1901 to 1981 Census Canada reports summarize the pattern and extent of Mennonite settlement in B.C.

**Table 4. Mennonites in B.C. and Canada 1901-1981**

Census	Canada	B.C.	B.C.%
1901	31,949	011	0.03
1911	44,972	191	0.42
1921	58,874	173	0.29
1931	88,837	1,095	1.23
1941	111,554	5,119	4.58
1951	125,938	15,387	12.22
1961	152,452	19,932	13.07
1971	168,150	26,520	15.77
1981	189,370	30,895	16.31

(Census Canada, 1901-1981)

When a larger group of about one hundred Mennonite Brethren with a number of draft age men among them arrived from Manitoba and Minnesota in 1918 and settled at Engen near Vanderhoof there was a public outcry that reached Victoria (Epp, 1982: 33; Neufeld, undated). Premier Oliver promptly ordered an investigation and the government issued a statement to reassure veterans groups that,

"No matter what the laws of Canada may be, there is no intention on the part of the Provincial Government to welcome the conscientious objector in batches, while the individual applicant in the same strain will be gently told to ponder over his decision to cross the border to make Canada his hiding place from the long arm of American draft law" (Victoria Daily Times, Sept. 16, 1918: 18).

The government ordered all Mennonites to register for military service within ten days and those who could not produce a certificate of exemption from an official tribunal were to be designated Canadian class one in the draft (Victoria Daily Times, Oct. 26, 1918: 12). The Canadian government moved concurrently to limit exemptions only to Mennonites directly affected by the August 13, 1873 Order in Council. All other Mennonites including those who had emigrated from the U.S.A. were made subject to the draft.

The Engen settlers may have been aware of the controversy that surrounded them but were convinced both of the rightness of their pacifist position and that the remoteness of the community would give them immunity from draft laws in the U.S.A. and Canada (Neufeld, undated). Even the provincial restrictions to keep them from pre-empting crown land (Victoria Daily Times, Nov. 7, 1918: 8) or purchasing No. 1 land did not deter them (Victoria Daily Times, Oct. 2, 1918: 13). Neither of these are mentioned in Neufeld's account.

The community dissolved two years later for other reasons; WWI ended in 1919, Bishop Heinrich Voth, the community's spiritual leader, died and the climate and remoteness of the area lacked sufficient potential to support the settlement. The real significance of the incident is that it set the tone for public attitudes and the B.C. government's disposition towards Mennonites who followed them a decade later.

In the intervening years these sentiments were kept alive in the public press. Articles and editorials entitled "Mennonite Dreamers" (The Daily Colonist, May 5, 1920: 4), "Farmers Protest Admission of Mennonites from Russia" (The Vancouver Sun, Nov. 9, 1925: 1) and "Mennonite Colony Regarded Here with Opposition" (Victoria Daily Times, Dec. 8, 1927: 18) characterized Mennonites as impossible idealists, law breakers and an inferior class of settler.

When Mennonites began arriving in B.C. in significant numbers in 1928 they came as economic migrants from the prairie provinces or as newly arrived immigrants from Russia. Unlike other Mennonite migrations the move to B.C. was taken on personal rather than

communal initiative and involved land situated in the heart of B.C.'s growing agricultural community in the Fraser Valley rather than some isolated location. Only on the 700 acres owned by Eckert and Crain on the present site of Yarrow, were they able to replicate a traditional Mennonite village pattern with some success. An unsuccessful attempt by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization to establish a compact community at Pitt Meadows in 1936 was abandoned the following year because of drainage problems and the reluctance of settlers to move there. The Yarrow settlement was too small to absorb the increasing numbers of Mennonites coming to B.C. so increasing numbers purchased land throughout the valley with concentrations near Sardis/Chilliwack, Abbotsford/Clearbrook and Aldergrove/Langley. Smaller groups settled in Black Creek, Oliver, Kelowna and Armstrong.

Economic considerations dominated the first years. The early agricultural experiments in growing rhubarb, beans and sugar beets either couldn't find stable markets or proved unsuitable for the soil conditions in the area. The need to supplement their farm income with outside employment made extensive contact with the surrounding community essential for basic survival. Initially most Mennonites found employment at Eddie's Nursery, the nearby hop yards and the tobacco fields. In the hop yards, whole families participated during the harvest (Kehler, 1951: 5) and displaced many of the traditional Indian pickers. It was only when the Japanese monopoly in the berry market was broken by their internment during WWII that Mennonites were able to develop more stable and lucrative strawberry and raspberry farms (Norris, 1971: 187). Most families

also supplemented their agricultural income by sending the surplus youth into the city as laborers or domestics. Given the limited land base and limitations of the rural economy a more permanent drift to the city became inevitable.

While Mennonites continued to migrate to B.C. from the prairies they represented a trickle compared to the influx that arrived after WWII. Largely because of post war immigration the Mennonite population in B.C. grew dramatically from 5,119 in 1941 to 15,387 in 1951 (Census Canada, 1941 & 1951). Partly due to the inability of the agricultural community to absorb this group but also because of the availability of work in urban centers many of these soon found their way to the city.

The determination to settle permanently was demonstrated by the rapid development of an institutional base. Most important to Mennonites and the first institution to be formed was the church. It also proved the most contentious as it divided the community along traditional lines. The first settlers were mainly from the *Kirchliche* tradition who were joined by an increasing number of Mennonite Brethren. Initially this presented little difficulty, but as the balance between the two groups shifted the Mennonite Brethren who were a more organized and homogeneous group formed an independent church.

"The division between the Mennonite Brethern and the Kirchliche took place when the latter were refused the communion unless they were re-baptised, declaring that the baptism by sprinkling was invalid. The M.B. wanted the Kirchliche as their missionfield and Rev. Bahnman said, "No." (Kehler, 1951:24).

Bahnman's resistance resulted in his eviction from Yarrow after five petitioners made representation to the village authorities

denouncing him as an undesirable element (The Herald, Nov. 28, 1928). Resistance continued from the *Kirchliche*, but without strong local leadership the Mennonite Brethren were left firmly in control of Yarrow. Bahnman settled in Sardis and organized a church which affiliated with the General Conference. The potential for laying aside traditional religious divisions in B.C. quickly evaporated and the Yarrow pattern was replicated in all of the other settlements.

Over the years Mennonites in B.C. developed a strong institutional base for a group of their size. The Mennonite Brethren formed a provincial Conference in 1931 and the General Conference followed in 1936. Between 1938 and 1956 they jointly operated an eight hundred member Bethesda Mennonite Health Society involving 30 doctors (Norris, 1971: 189). Private schools were started in Yarrow (1945) and Clearbrook (1943). Of these the Mennonite Educational Institute in Clearbrook still operates an expanding campus. Initially each Conference developed its own Bible School program which they have since merged into the Columbia Bible College Society (1972). A B.C. branch of Mennonite Central Committee was officially formed in 1945 but B.C. Mennonites had already participated in relief projects during WWII through the parent organization. The Menno Benevolent Society (1953) and Tabor Home Society (1960) were organized to provide care for the aged and chronically ill.

On the economic front Mennonites in B.C. brought with them the experience of joint action. The marketing problems they initially experienced were solved by the formation of a cooperative in 1937. By 1943 the Yarrow Growers Cooperative Union controlled four

hundred and ninety-five acres of berries and operated a jam factory, a produce station, cold storage, box factory, elevator, two lumber yards and two retail outlets (Wiens, 1946: 10). While agriculture continued to represent the Mennonite ideal because of its relatively autonomous lifestyle, its limited potential to accommodate a growing Mennonite population in B.C. combined with a rejection of traditional responses to threats to their autonomy and survival needs dictated a reorientation of Mennonite cultural self-definition. The break-up of Yarrow as a closed Mennonite community, rapid urbanization, a growing business class, increasing involvement in higher education and the professions has, with the exception of several small exclusive groups (Old Order, Old Colony, Holdeman etc.), made Mennonites a less visible minority in B.C.

✓ Even though considerable hostility was directed towards Mennonites upon their arrival and government policy considered them less than desirable residents, the Mennonites do not seem to have entertained group emigration to Mexico and South America in response to public pressure as some in Manitoba and Saskatchewan had. Resistance to Mennonite settlement by Chilliwack residents and the Fraser Valley Board of Trade prompted the Government to place a ban on the sale of public land to Mennonites (The Vancouver Sun, Feb. 2, 1929: 16). In the revision of the Elections Act in 1931 the government stripped Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors of the right to vote on the basis of their exemption from military service granted by the federal government in 1873 and 1899 (Queen's Printer, 1931: 87). Both of these initiatives appear to have been symbolic. The ban on the purchase of public land in the Sumas



reclamation area did not extend to speculators who had taken up all of the available land and private sales were not included in the government directive. The disenfranchisement of Mennonites went virtually unnoticed and was restored when it was discovered during the 1947 revision of the Act.

The objection to Mennonite settlement continued during the 1930s. L.H. Eyres M.P.P. for Chilliwack summarized the attitude in an address to the Victoria Women's Conservative Association on November 10, 1938.

"There is one serious condition in our valley," he continued, "we are having a peaceful penetration of the Chilliwack Valley. Three thousand Mennonites have settled in the Sumas district, where they have taken up land, are self-supporting and are gradually creeping into businesses. Their standard of living is lower than we would like to see and we are finding in that penetration a problem which may have a more serious effect. We want our valley and the rest of British Columbia peopled by British stock" (The Daily Colonist, Nov. 11, 1938).

However, it was not until after Canada's entry into WWII that this attitude turned to open hostility. Even though an estimated 66% of the Mennonites drafted during the war joined the service (The Vancouver Sun, Dec. 9, 1943: 17), and despite pledges of loyalty to Canada (The Vancouver Sun, Sept. 25, 1939:3), participation in bond drives supporting the Red Cross (Abbotsford, Sumas and Matzqui News, Oct. 4, 1939: 4) and the collection of substantial funds for Mennonite relief efforts in England during the war (The Vancouver Daily Province, June 11, 1940:2), Mennonites were characterized as "a real danger of fifth column activity" and a "definite menace" by the Associated Boards of Trade of the Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland (The Daily Province, Sept. 4, 1940:24). Despite these expressions of public hostility a determination to put down

permanent roots and find an acceptable accommodation with British Columbian society persisted among the Mennonites. At the same time they were not willing to give up their distinctiveness entirely and accepted the consequences of maintaining minority status.

## **Discussion**

Traditional forms of analysis could explain the transformations as a progressive movement towards cultural homogenization if it were not for the evidence of choice and intentionality on the part of the dominant culture as well as the Mennonites. Anabaptists could have been reabsorbed into European society had they not been as adamant about their position and the authorities not as quick to identify the scattered and often divided pockets of reform as a single movement. In Prussia the Mennonites could have resolved the growing hostility by merging with the Lutheran majority but decided to remain distinct. Assimilation in Russia was more problematic because Mennonites were identified with another nationality and the wealthy landholding class. Even though Canadian Mennonites have adopted many of the behaviors of the Anglo-majority they have developed an independent institutional base to maintain their distinctiveness. The coercive and subtle pressures of assimilation have always been there but so have the options of resistance, voluntary segregation, accommodation and integration. These are more clearly supported by the evidence and therefore important for understanding the struggle for self-definition among Mennonites

The description of some of the major transformations of the Anabaptists and their Mennonite successors' identity defines them as a minority culture. Their concern was informed by religion and related to a 'whole way of life.' The 'informing spirit' of original Anabaptist culture was centered on the reformation's emphasis on the supremacy of 'godly law' based on the Bible, *Gelassenheit* taken from the monastic tradition and an idealistic vision of a future society modeled on the kingdom of God that had ramifications for the economic, political, social and religious restructuring of society. Mennonite culture has also been constitutive in that the Anabaptist ideals have been continuously redefined in response to internal processes and external pressures that were religious, social, political, and economic in nature. While the documentation supports a distinctive Anabaptist and Mennonite identity, the culture's historical transformations exhibit the characteristics of a 'between culture.' Elements from the past have constantly been redefined and recombined with a changing vision of the future in an attempt to construct a consistent way of life. The realization of this goal consistently eluded them due to a lack of internal cohesion and the intervention of the host culture. The radical reform movements became quietist agricultural communities in Prussia, then a socio-religious commonwealth in Russia. In Canada they began as a closed community that resisted absorption but eventually evolved into a partially integrated cultural minority.

The pattern of transformation also illustrates the plural and competing nature of knowledge. The early Anabaptists like the 'revolution of the common man' pitted 'godly law' against the

exclusive authority of magisterial and Roman law. Even after Luther had solved the dilemma by separating the jurisdictions of the church and state and the Peasants were silenced, the Anabaptists held on to the ideals of 'godly law' as the basis for social reform. Their idealistic solution to the crisis in feudalism was soon sidelined by persecution but expressions of it have been retained in a remnant population. Particularly problematic have been the positions of separation from the world and non-resistance. In Prussia, Russia and Canada these resulted in public suspicion and hostility, and coercive government policies.

Throughout their history Mennonites have been plagued by repeated episodes of divergence and convergence that have weakened their position in relation to the dominant culture. This lack of homogeneity was a product of their plural beginnings and a congregational polity that emphasized local autonomy rather than a hierarchical institutional authority. Originally the European authorities followed a repressive policy that was not open to negotiation. In Prussia there was tolerance initially but this rapidly deteriorated when the dominant Lutheran church and the military felt threatened. Mennonite representations to the government had little effect. In Russia they were initially welcomed but once established they had to contend with a removal of earlier privileges and the imposition of a program of Russification. Mennonite representation was able to negotiate a compromise but not a stable solution to growing resentment towards them in Russia. The Bolshevik regime quickly negated their cultural distinctiveness. The Canadian period was initially marked by Mennonite autonomy

guaranteed by the August 13, 1873 Order in Council with an undercurrent of Anglo-conformity becoming more pronounced during and after WWI. This became the norm for the second wave of Mennonite immigrants who came without any guarantees and so were left vulnerable during the draft in WWII. The third and fourth wave came mainly as refugees and were therefore predisposed to fitting in to recapture a future for themselves and their children. The outcome of transactions with the dominant culture has included coercion, conflict, resistance, voluntary and involuntary segregation, accommodation and behavioral assimilation. These point to significant transformations in Mennonite identity over time which are characterized by issues of difference, change and struggle more than homogenization, stasis and order.

## CHAPTER 4 - GENERAL CONFERENCE MENNONITES IN B.C.

"In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty" (Krehbiel, 1898: 58-59)

The last chapter outlined the historical patterns of transformation in Mennonite identity with attention given to the Dutch-North, German-Prussian and Russian *Kirchliche* tradition out of which most General Conference Mennonites in B.C. come. The *Kirchliche* tradition, as characterized earlier, consisted of autonomous congregations fraternally connected but having no central structures of authority. The first emigration to Canada was made up of complete villages or congregations which, with few exceptions, replicated this form in Canada. The *Kirchliche* Mennonites in the second and third wave were less homogeneous and brought fewer parochial loyalties with them. As a result they were more predisposed to reorganizing their community and congregational life. This process was aided by a movement of convergence that was already underway among the Swiss and South German Mennonites who had preceded them and settled in the United States and the Bergthaler and Rosenorter cluster of churches in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Since the majority of the *Kirchliche* in Canada joined the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada a brief outline of their history is in order. The remainder of the chapter summarizes the organizational activity among the *Kirchliche* at the provincial level and the factors affecting the process of self-definition.

## General Conference Connections - Organizing the Frontier

There is evidence, but few details, of Mennonite involvement in the Dutch trading colonies of Manhattan, Long Island and Delaware beginning in 1643 (Kaufman, 1931:10).

**Table 5. Major Mennonite Emigrations to North America**

GROUP	DATE	NUMBER	ORIGIN	DESTINATION
1. German	1683-1705	100	Lower Rhine, Germany	Germantown, PA
2. Swiss Conservative	1707-1756	3,400	Switzerland, Palatinate	Southeastern PA
Swiss Amish		300	Switzerland, Palatinate	Southeastern PA
3. Swiss Amish	1815-1860	3,000	Alsace, Bavaria, Hesse	Ontario, OH, IN, IL
4. Swiss Conservative	1830-1860	500	Switzerland	OH
5. Swiss Conservative	1865-1895	300	Switzerland	OH, IN, IL
6. Kirchliche, EMC, MB	1873-1884	10,000	Southern Russia	Manitoba, NB, SD, KS
Kirchliche, EMC, KMB	1873-1884	8,000	Southern Russia	Manitoba
Dutch, German, Swiss	1873-1884	400	Galacia, Volhynia, Poland	KS, SD
7. Kirchliche, MB	1922-1930	21,000	Southern Russia	Canada
8. Kirchliche, MB	1947-1953	7,000	Southern Russia	Canada

(Adapted from Hiebert (1974, vi)

The first clearly documented group of Mennonites in America arrived in 1683 and settled near Germantown, Pennsylvania. They came from Germany but were of Dutch extraction. A larger group of three thousand seven hundred from Switzerland and South Germany followed them between 1707 and 1756. They were part of a major migration of one hundred thousand Germans from the Palatinate (Pannabecker, 1975: 7). The three thousand Swiss Amish who came between 1815 and 1860 had fled persecution in Switzerland in the sixteenth century and settled in Germany prior to emigrating. Two smaller groups from Switzerland arrived later. Some of the Amish joined Amish and Mennonites who had settled in Southern Ontario after the American States declared independence from Britain. They had objected to the oath of allegiance and payment of war taxes that

the new republic demanded and favored living under the more benevolent British Crown (Epp, 1974: 42-43).

Congregational polity similar to that of the Russian *Kirchliche* Mennonites was the norm among the American Mennonites until the mid-nineteenth century. Ministers' meetings involving regional groups were held to discuss matters concerning the maintenance of orthodoxy and the exercise of church discipline.

"In character these conferences were not progressive but conservative, not constructive but purifying, not tolerant but exclusive. For this reason it was impossible that through them the unification of the various and differing churches should be secured. Erroneously it was held that union must rest on an absolute likeness in doctrines and customs. This led to strict laws to secure external uniformity. But instead of being the means to bring the churches into more fraternal relation it multiplied prejudices and increased divisions." (Krehbiel, 1898: 7-8)

In light of this introverted practice, the incursions of American revivalist denominations, the scattering of Mennonites along the frontier and the fragmentation of Mennonite orthodoxy, more progressive ministers began to seek a change in polity. In 1847 a controversy over ministerial garb, the keeping of minutes and the introduction of a constitution led to a schism involving fourteen churches in Eastern Pennsylvania (Pannabecker, 1975: 16-25). John H. Oberholzer, the central figure in this development, linked up with Daniel Hoch and Ephraim Hunsberger in Ontario and Ohio who had also become estranged from the old church. In 1855 the latter two had formed the Canada and Ohio Conference.

Oberholzer published the *Religoeser Botschafter*<sup>18</sup> in which he advocated change and the formation of a Conference that would unite

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<sup>18</sup> Oberholzer was not only the publisher but editor, writer and printer of The *Religoeser Botschafter*. The paper was renamed the *Christlicher Bundesbote* when it was turned over to a society but Oberholzer continued to be the main actor. The paper became the official German publication of the General Conference Church after 1882. In



all Mennonites in America. However, the initiative that led to the actual formation of the General Conference Mennonite Church came from South German Mennonites who had settled in Iowa and Illinois between 1830 and 1850. In 1859 the churches at West Point and Franklin accepted resolutions authorizing the collection of funds for foreign and home missions, the payment of travel expenses for a minister to visit Mennonites on the frontier and formed a committee to invite other Mennonite churches to join their union (1975: 44).

The first meeting to unite Mennonites in America was held on May 28-29, 1860 at West Point, Iowa. Oberholzer and Enos Loux represented the Pennsylvania churches. The terms of union called for a recognition of congregational autonomy and unity in essentials and tolerance in non-essentials. The fifth resolution read;

"That every church or district shall be entitled to continue, without molestation or hindrance and amenable only to their own conscience, any rules or regulations they may have adopted for their own government; provided they do not conflict with the tenets of our general confession" (Krehbiel, 1898: 57).

By calling for tolerance and not insisting on total uniformity they had sidestepped the main problem that had plagued Mennonite history from the beginning. Schisms had historically developed over minor issues and seldom matters of substance.

The purpose of the union was outlined as foreign missions, home missions, publication and education. These correspond closely with the present General Conference Mennonite Churches structure: Commission on Overseas Mission, Commission on Home Ministries and Commission on Education (publication is part of General Board).

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1947 it was merged with the Canadian *Der Bote* and is still published and now has an international German readership.

While the idealistic goal of uniting all Mennonites into one Conference was not achieved the General Conference Mennonite Church had a significant influence on the American and Canadian frontiers largely due to the Home Mission Commissions' emphasis on *Reiseprediger* who visited and organized Mennonites scattered along the frontier. Eight thousand five hundred *Kirchliche* of the seventeen thousand Mennonites who emigrated from Russia between 1874-1879 and settled in the United States quickly came under the General Conference's sphere of influence soon after their arrival. When J.B. Baer was hired by the Home Missions Commission in 1887 he extended his circuit to the Mennonite reserves in Manitoba (Krehbiel, 1898: 347). General Conference influence in Canada continued to grow after a number of Kansas and Oklahoma Mennonites migrated north at the turn of the century to take up homesteads near Drake, Herbert, Langham, Waldheim and Great Deer, Saskatchewan (Pannabecker, 1975: 149). General Conference assigned *Aeltester* H.J. Brown and *Aeltester* N.F. Toews from Mountain Lake Minnesota to visit and organize these groups. When Mennonites began moving further west General Conference assumed responsibility for them as well. In 1914 the Home Missions Commission assigned Toews to visit the groups in Alberta, and Nelson and Renatta, B.C.

The Canadian *Reiseprediger* came under the supervision of *Aeltester* David Toews, a member of the General Conference Mennonite Church's Home Missions Commission. He was an educator who had come from Kansas with H.H. Ewert in 1891, settled in Rosthern, Saskatchewan and became the *Aeltester* of the Rosenorter

group of Churches in Saskatchewan (Krehbiel, 1938:127,148). He was instrumental in ensuring that the scattered Mennonite groups received pastoral care. With the exception of an exploratory trip of *Aeltester* N.W. Bahnman and *Aeltester* J.B. Wiens to Vancouver in the early 1920s the *Reiseprediger* confined their visits to the twelve families at Renatta until 1928 (Harder, 1981: 1).

The situation changed rapidly in the wake of the second wave of immigration between 1923 and 1930. The Home Missions Commission summarized the situation in 1933 as,

"The immigration from Russia the past few years has scattered our Mennonite people all over the Canadian Provinces. They were like sheep scattered by wolves and without shepherds. To minister to these scattered groups and individuals and gather them and reorganize them into congregations has been our task." (Krehbiel, 1938: 477)

The Commission responded to the rapidly rising Mennonite population in Canada by financially supporting ministers among the immigrants and in B.C., assigning *Aeltester* N.W. Bahnman to Yarrow (1928-1934 & 1938-1942), *Aeltester* J.H. Janzen to Vancouver (1935-1937) and, following him *Aeltester* J.B. Wiens (1937-). Janzen and Wiens established a *Maedchenheim*<sup>19</sup> as an employment agency and home for Mennonite women working in the city and began organizing the *Kirchliche* Mennonites in the city (Harder, 1981: 1-3). In this they followed the pattern General Conference had already used in

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<sup>19</sup> The first Mennonite institutions to be formed in Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Vancouver were homes for the increasing number of women living in the cities to supplement the farm income of their parents. Many had only finished grade eight and found work as nannies or domestics. The Home Missions Board of the General Conference Church assigned one of its *Reiseprediger* to manage the facility which served as a residence and employment agency. *Aeltester* Jacob Janzen was sent to Vancouver for this purpose. During his two years in Vancouver he organized the First United Mennonite Church and was a major force in the organization of the B.C. Conference. In 1937 he was succeeded by his son-in-law *Aeltester* J.B. Wiens (G9).

Winnipeg and Saskatoon. In total General Conference has been directly involved in organizing eleven churches in B.C. between 1929 and 1980 (Barrett, 1983: 276-277).

### **Conference of Mennonites in Canada - Creating Community**

On July 20-21, 1903 delegates from the Bergthaler cluster of churches in Manitoba and the Rosenorter churches in Saskatchewan met for the first time in an effort to unite the Mennonites in the prairie region into a Conference. Both the Bergthaler and Rosenorter churches had a sizable membership base, were progressive in the adoption of innovations such as Sunday Schools, Bible Studies, Youth programs and operated private schools. Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna and the German-English Academy in Rosthern had similar goals of preparing teachers for schools in Mennonite communities and the advancement of Mennonite culture. They differed only in that the Rosenorter churches were also members of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Bergthaler churches joined in 1968 <sup>20</sup> (Pannabecker, 1975:153-154). The terms of union were broad enough to accommodate a national constituency which in 1991 included 28,750 members from New Brunswick to B.C. and 8,300 associate members in dually affiliated congregations in Ontario (CMC Yearbook, 1991).

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<sup>20</sup> The Bergthaler churches were a cluster of churches in Southern Manitoba under two bishops formed from the more progressive elements of the immigrants from the Bergthal Colony in Russia. They are distinct from the Conservative Bergthaler churches in Saskatchewan. While they did not officially join the General Conference until 1968 they participated in General Conference programs from the outset. In 1960 they officially merged their program with the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. While many of the churches have retained the Bergthaler name they no longer function as a distinct group.

Probably influenced by the presence of a number of delegates from General Conference background, the principle of union contained a similar agreement on congregational autonomy and concern for members scattered along the frontier (Rempel, 1952a: 25). The constitution accepted the following year stated that membership was open to all churches who adhered to the "*Glaubensbekenntnis der Mennoniten in Preussen und Ruszland*." (Creed of the Mennonites in Prussia and Russia)(1952a: 27). It further stated that,

"The Conference has no authority to interfere in the internal matters of a congregation unless called to do so. It is not a legislative, but an advisory body. The union it promotes does not consist in agreeable forms and customs, but in unity of love, faith, and hope, and in connection with this a common work in the kingdom of God" (Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 1: 671)

Similar to the General Conference Mennonite Churches principle of "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty" (Krehbiel, 1898: 58-59) this statement allowed for union without demanding total uniformity. The arrangement left each group room to develop independently while participating in joint programs.

A survey of the reports of the early conferences reveals an emphasis on fraternal activities around discussion papers involving congregational and pastoral concerns. The development of joint programs took some time. The most pressing issue of mutual interest to both groups had to do with servicing members scattered on the northern and western frontiers. While the Canadian response was similar to that of the General Conference the two programs complemented rather than competed with each other largely due to *Aeltester* David Toews' dual role. As a Member of the Home

Missions Board he supervised the Canadian *Reiseprediger* and served as chairperson of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada between 1914 and 1940 (Warkentin, 1943: 245). This cooperation is reflected in the statistic that seven of the twenty-two B.C. churches formed with the assistance of the Canadian Conference also involved General Conference cooperation (Barrett, 1983: 276-277).

Accommodating the 21,000 Mennonites who arrived between 1923-30 was a continuing agenda for the Conference in the following decade. The majority of the new immigrants were of *Kirchliche* background and attached themselves to Conference of Mennonites in Canada affiliated churches. *Aeltester* David Toews, the chairman of the Conference also chaired the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization from 1922 to 1946 (Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 1: 507-508). In this dual capacity he took opportunity to report on the issues of immigration and resettlement at the annual sessions and influenced the formation of a Colonization Committee to address these concerns.

When the conditions in Russia deteriorated and pressure to emigrate was mounting the Conference supported Benjamin Unruh, a Professor in Germany, to assist emigration efforts. Unruh obtained permission from the German government to move Mennonites from Russia into camps in Germany before Canada decided to lift its prohibition on Mennonite immigration in July of 1923 and again in 1929 when six thousand Mennonites were stranded in Moscow because no third country could be found for them to go to (Epp, 1982: 168,305; Unruh, 1966: 12). In addition to the implications the emigration had on the Home Missions Committee the Conference

became involved in providing assistance to indigent Mennonites in Canada and Southern Russia directly. Committees formed during this period included the *Armenpflege Komitee* (Charity Committee)<sup>21</sup> and the *Kolonisationskomitee* (Colonization Committee). These committees provided a major program focus for the Conference during the 1920s and 1930s. Conference attention shifted to issues of non resistance, war relief and mutual aid in the early 1940s.

In the first forty-five years the Conference was very active both in promoting unity and developing joint programs but had not developed an institutional base or formal organizational structure. While the Conference approved a constitution at its second session, incorporation as a society did not occur until March 20, 1947 (CMC Yearbook, 1947: 34-40). At the time of incorporation the activity of the Conference was divided between ten committees. These have since been reorganized several times. The most recent restructuring occurred in the summer of 1992 dividing the Canadian Conference program between Higher Education, Congregational, Outreach Ministries and Ministerial Leadership Commissions. The Canadian Mennonite Bible College Board was unchanged.

Major institutional development also occurred since incorporation in 1947. Till then the Canadian Conference had acquired few assets and operated with minimal committee expenses. In 1991 it reported assets of \$4,818,984 and an expenditure budget

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<sup>21</sup> Mennonites had traditionally had a mutual aid society (Waiesenamt) to look after the needs of widows, orphans and the poor. This fund collapsed in the 1920s when the Mennonites emigrating to Mexico withdrew their accounts. The fund was further weakened by the downturn in the farm economy. The Conference committee was to fill the gap. It gave particular attention to the single parent families and orphaned children.

of \$4,776,305 (CMC Report, 1992: 18). Despite rapid institutionalization the Conference has retained its original intent of addressing congregational concerns and facilitating joint programming. However, in keeping with the principle of congregational autonomy the initiatives this structure represents are only implemented at a church's or provincial Conference's request. As a result the Conference of Mennonites in Canada continues to be a fraternal and facilitating rather than legislative body.

### **General Conference Profile in B.C.: A Community in Ferment**

As outlined earlier, the formation of a General Conference identity in B.C. was influenced by the *Reiseprediger* program of the General Conference Mennonite Church which assisted the organization of churches on the frontier. This was supplemented by the Home Missions efforts of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada who shared a similar concern and particularly during the 1920s and 1930s was involved in issues of immigration and resettlement affecting B.C. Mennonites. A separate General Conference identity in B.C. was initially focused by the unfortunate incident in 1929 in which the *Kirchliche* mode of baptism was termed invalid by the Mennonite Brethren. The convergence of these factors set the stage for the development of a separate organizational structure.

On November 27, 1936 twenty-four delegates representing seven organized groups met at Sardis to discuss the terms of union. The *Protokoll* (minutes) report that the principle of congregational autonomy was reaffirmed and incorporation for the purposes of



holding property and the registration of ministers was agreed on. Till then Mennonite ministers in the province had no legal status and church properties were registered in the names of individuals. The overriding concern expressed at this session involved the pastoral needs of smaller unorganized groups without resident ministers. Since the clergy were not salaried a schedule was drawn up and a general fund from a levy of \$.50 per member was established to ensure regular ministerial visits to outlying areas and the defraying of the expenses involved. Other recommendations involved the holding of regional Bible study conferences, the establishment of a Bible school and the institution of semi-annual ministers' conferences supplemented with short courses for ministers.

*Der Konferenz der Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden in Britisch Columbien* (The Conference of United Mennonite Churches in British Columbia) was registered with the provincial government soon after this initial meeting but only officially incorporated on July 22, 1940. The name has since been changed to the Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia.

The original document contained a clause that required all member churches to sign their assets in land and buildings over to the provincial Conference. This gave the properties tax free status and limited personal liability (Lehn, 1990: 37-38). The clause has survived several revisions of the constitution and represents a qualification to the absolute autonomy of local congregations that is the norm in General Conference polity.

**Table 6 - General Conference Membership Compared to Provincial Total**

Year	Total Mennonites in B.C.	CMBC Members	% CMBC Members
1931	1,095	80	00.73
1941	5,119	426	08.32
1951	15,387	1,629	10.58
1961	19,932	2,636	13.22
1971	26,520	3,363	12.68
1981	30,895	4,406	14.26
1991	N/A	4,527	N/A

(Census Canada, 1931-1981; CMC Yearbook, 1931-1991)

Membership in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada as a block of churches appears to have been assumed since the 1938 *Protokol* reports sending four delegates to its annual sessions in 1937. A similar group membership in the General Conference Mennonite Church was sought but could not be facilitated so churches joined individually beginning in 1938 (Lehn, 1990: 41-42). A profile of Conference affiliation reveals that of the twenty-six member churches in the B.C. Conference in 1991, twenty-three are also members of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and nineteen of the General Conference Mennonite Church (Handbook of Information, 1991; CMC Yearbook, 1991; CMBC Report Booklet, 1991).

The development of the provincial Conference followed the resolutions passed at its founding meeting. The pastoral needs of the scattered groups were met through a co-ordinated effort of ministers supported by all three levels of Conference. The supervision of this program eventually shifted to the provincial Conference with the other two Conferences sharing in the expense. This pattern of cooperation has continued even though the form has

changed to providing subsidies to small or new groups to enable them to hire their own ministers.

The resolution to hold semi-annual ministers and deacon's meetings continues to be the practice. Similar to the early Canadian Conference pattern, position papers on congregational and pastoral issues are presented and discussed at these meetings. Continuing education for ministers is presently offered through a co-ordinated program of Conference Based Theological Education involving all levels of Conference.

The recommendation to found a Bible School was first implemented by *Aeltester* N.W. Bahnman in 1939 on a volunteer basis. In 1941 the B.C. Conference assumed responsibility for the school but turned it over to a *Schulverien* (school society) for three years. In 1945 the Conference resumed full responsibility and in 1970 entered into a working agreement with the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute to merge their two programs on one campus. At present the Conference is a partner in the Columbia Bible College Society which operates the school (Sawatzky, 1984; Schmidt, 1989).

The Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia has developed rapidly from a volunteer organization with a minimal budget into an institution with nine full-time employees and a 1991 expenditure budget of \$829,948. The report book for the 58th annual sessions held on June 12-13, 1992 shows that many of the Conference programs still operate on a volunteer basis (Church Ministries, Christian Education, Music). Programs that involve employees and/or significant budget expenditures are Executive

Committee<sup>22</sup> , Evangelism and Church Development (formerly called Missions and Service),<sup>23</sup> participation in the Columbia Bible College Society, Camp Squeah<sup>24</sup> and Youth Ministries.

The above profile has emphasized the movements of convergence involved in the creation of a distinct General Conference identity in B.C. In reality the community also has experienced considerable ferment that has contributed to its character. Firstly, one feature that distinguishes General Conference Mennonites from other Mennonites in B.C. is the diversity represented in the membership. Mennonites immigrating or migrating to B.C. had two basic choices if they wished to retain Mennonite membership; Mennonite Brethren or General Conference. The smaller groups of Mennonites represented in the province are more exclusive and isolated and therefore represent a less accessible choice.

As was pointed out earlier the Mennonite Brethren were more numerous and homogeneous than the General Conference but the latter were more tolerant and therefore accommodating to a greater variety of expressions of the Mennonite tradition. Members

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<sup>22</sup> The Executive Committee employs a Conference Minister as a resource for ministers and congregations. In practice this position amounts to the chief executive officer of the Conference, being responsible for the management and coordination of the entire program.

<sup>23</sup> Several years ago the Conference became alarmed at declining membership and so hired a coordinator to give attention to this concern. To date he has introduced the LIFE program to existing congregations and helped organize several new churches. What they did not take into account was the decline in the size of families. This combined with insistence on voluntary membership made the decline inevitable.

<sup>24</sup> Camp Squeah (Salish for place of refuge) is a large camp north of Hope B.C. which is owned and operated by the Conference. It operates a year-round program that is supported entirely by fees charged Conference and outside users.

represent the internal migration of groups from the prairie provinces included in the *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* designations, emigration direct from Danzig and Germany, WWII refugees and transmigrations via Mexico and South America. In recent years the resettlement of refugees from Southeast Asia and Central America and immigration from India, Hong Kong and Japan have been added to the mix. Inherent in accommodating this variety is the challenge of emphasizing unity rather than uniformity, difference rather than homogeneity and change rather than stasis. Attempting to balance these dichotomous elements has been a constant struggle for General Conference Mennonites in B.C. that is only partly resolved by the natural clustering of different groups into autonomous congregations.

Secondly, despite the principles of "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty" (Krehbiel, 1898: 58-59) which made it possible for Mennonites to unite fraternally and for purposes of joint program, the risk of serious controversies emerging could not be averted entirely. The central issue that has surfaced has to do with the Anabaptist understanding of salvation. Contrary to Luther and the Protestant Reformation's exclusive emphasis on grace, Menno Simons and the other Anabaptist reformers stressed the need for an adult conversion experience concurrent with the signs of a committed life based on the redemptive work and example of Jesus. The balancing of the relationship between conversion and the committed life in their theology of salvation has proven problematic for Mennonites over the years.

The *Kirchliche* tradition held that the socialization of children was complete when they became members after baptism as adults. Preparation for baptism included three to ten months of theological instruction under the direction of the local *Aeltester* and lay ministers. Baptism in the form of sprinkling or pouring was a sign of entry into the committed life. It is over this institutionalization of salvation that the Mennonite Brethren broke with the *Kirchliche* in 1860 under the influence of Lutheran Pietists and German Baptists. The same influence convinced the Mennonite Brethren to adopt the need for a crisis conversion experience and the exclusive practice of immersion baptism as a seal of salvation.

The Mennonite Brethren were not alone in challenging the *Kirchliche* interpretation and practice of salvation theology. The General Conference Mennonite Church's development was influenced by American revivalism and the fundamentalist/liberal debate which grew out of it in the early twentieth century. In practice General Conference *Reiseprediger* often doubled as *Aeltester* and traveling evangelists. A survey of *Aeltester* N.W. Bahnman's sermon notes indicates a strong emphasis on repentance and conversion.

In 1954 *Aeltester* Heinrich M. Epp from West Abbotsford who was also chairperson of the B.C. Conference from 1949 to 1952, reported a polarization developing in the Conference that had reached an *impasse* and outlined the reasons behind the withdrawal of his church from the B.C. Conference on Dec. 28, 1953. His conclusion was that the emphasis on tolerance in the constitution had allowed 'unspiritual' elements to gain control of the Conference (H.M. Epp to J.J. Thiessen, June 7, 1954). West Abbotsford had

advocated the spiritual development of the Conference involving the exclusive emphasis on conversion, the need for pure and holy living, the need for verbal confession and witnessing, adult baptism and stricter enforcement of church discipline (West Abbotsford to B.C. Conference, undated). Holy living in the statement referred to personal piety (refraining from lying, perjury, gossip, deceit, swearing, drinking, smoking, make-up) and not to the usual understanding of the committed life in Anabaptist terms (*Gelassenheit*, love, peace, mutual aid etc.). Even though West Abbotsford and East Chilliwack who had followed them out of the Conference rejoined the Conference in 1957, the issue of accommodating the dual concepts of conversion and the committed life in a theology of salvation continues to be an active issue within the Conference.

Thirdly, the urbanization of Mennonites in B.C. has occurred in several ways. As already mentioned, the need to supplement farm income and the inability to absorb continuing Mennonite emigration into the rural communities created a drift into Vancouver. In recent years rural areas in the Lower Fraser Valley including those with significant concentrations of Mennonites have become bedroom communities and service centers for the City of Vancouver. These developments have reduced the number of Mennonites engaged in farming to an estimated 8% (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991: 55). In the process they have had to overcome their traditional idealization of agriculture and stereotypes of the city as worldly and evil. The developments have resulted in a need for General Conference Mennonites to redefine the meaning of community without the

support of the relative autonomy of traditional agriculture and closed community structures.

**Table 7. General Conference Residence Pattern: Vancouver, Fraser Valley & other expressed in %**

Year	Vancouver	Fraser Valley	Other
1931	00.0	100.0	00.0
1941	14.1	69.5	16.4
1951	10.9	77.3	11.8
1961	27.3	67.1	05.6
1971	31.8	59.5	08.7
1981	31.2	58.7	10.1
1991	26.6	61.6	11.8

(CMC Yearbook, 1931-1991)

Fourthly, urbanization exposed General Conference Mennonites in B.C. to modernization and secularization in a new way. Mennonites in Russia had not resisted modernization *per se* but had controlled its implementation to promote the economic and cultural development of the community. The church and civil administration worked together to maintain 'a whole way of life.' In B.C. this total system could not be sustained. As a result the Mennonite communities' control was restricted to the church which was left with little coercive potential to enforce uniformity outside the religious sphere. The result of this shift has been a challenge to the authority of the church in secular matters. It has allowed more freedom for individualistic choices to be made by members. The consequences for General Conference Mennonites has been that an estimated 50% of the children of members exercise their choice to join other religious groups or retain Mennonite cultural affiliation without becoming members or withdraw from the church community



altogether. This is a dramatic departure from traditional experience and practice in which the socialization of children assumed adult membership.

## **Discussion**

General Conference Mennonites in B.C. hold membership in independent levels of Conferences comprised of three distinct voluntary associations of congregations. Most churches have delegate representation in the General Conference Mennonite Church, at the international, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, at the national and the Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia, at the provincial level. While each Conference has essentially the same constituency and considerable co-ordination occurs between them at the level of program they are not formally linked. The Conferences act more as auxiliaries to the local congregations than hierarchically structured legislative bodies. Their function is primarily fraternal and program oriented with final authority firmly retained by the autonomous but interdependent member congregations. Each church independently determines the extent to which Conference initiatives are incorporated into local programming.

All three levels of Conference have not stressed uniformity as essential for achieving unity. This position generated the tolerance necessary for uniting diverse expressions of the Mennonite tradition and others without similar roots at the Conference level but has not achieved a singular identity. Even regarding key beliefs such as salvation where unity was assumed differences in interpretation

have arisen internally influenced by co-religionists and modernity. Modernity has exacerbated the situation further by making a clear distinction between the sacred and the secular, increasing individualistic choices and limiting the earlier Mennonite cultural emphasis on 'a whole way of life' more narrowly to religious life. As a result, General Conference identity in B.C. represents a broad spectrum which is characterized by difference, struggle and change and therefore not a definable single identity. They represent a plurality of identities broadly united for fraternal and joint program reasons under the authority of a congregational polity.

## **CHAPTER 5 - STRUCTURAL IDENTIFICATION IN MINORITY CULTURES: IDENTITY AT THE SURFACE**

"I think right now everything is very pragmatic. We are more interested in things we are directly related to. . . . Commitment to the church in historical terms is almost gone. . . . For me, the important part is how can we adapt without losing our commitment to our faith instead of denying that is the way it is." (G5)

The foregoing chapters illustrate the complex historical elements that contribute to General Conference Mennonite identity in British Columbia. Rather than attempt an exhaustive explanation of the contemporary dimensions of this identity the thesis organizes and limits the analysis to "the basic components that constitute Mennonite community, which Theodore J. Gordon (1964) referred to as a group of individuals with a shared sense of peoplehood including both structural (territory, institutions, culture) and or symbolic (history, ideology, leadership) dimensions." (Driedger & Harder, 1990: 171) Since Mennonite identity historically involved a 'separation from the world' the additional factor of sectarianism is included. While each of the factors is examined separately it is understood they are mutually reinforcing and represent the constituent parts of a more comprehensive identity. This chapter examines the first three of these factors (territory, institutions, culture).

### **Identification with Territory: From Closed to Open Communities**

The usual understanding of territory as a people's historical identification with and claim to ancestral land needs to be qualified in the case of Mennonites. While they have attachments to places of residence, since the sixteenth century the Dutch-Prussian-Russian

Mennonites have made no claim to a homeland and have lived in territory and under conditions negotiated with a host society. In these territories they exercised relative autonomy but not sovereignty. Identification with territory historically meant having access to lands in which a total community could be maintained without interference. The initial intention had been to replicate this pattern in Canada. Only the first wave of emigration was able to negotiate conditions favorable to realizing these aspirations. Canada was interested in developing the frontier. Conditions had changed by the time the other waves arrived so the government was not inclined to make similar concessions beyond extending landed immigrant status.

It is clear from the preceding chapters that B.C. lacked the social climate and the natural geography for this pattern to be implemented with any success. In B.C. the traditional understanding of identification with territory needed to be redefined as the development of a critical mass in a given location for the maintenance of group solidarity and the socialization of children to group values (G2, G5, G10). This concern would also apply to the more recent Vietnamese, Chinese, Laotian and Punjabi Mennonites who, unlike their more traditional General Conference counterparts, retain identification with specific homelands (G1, G19).

In a sense the clustering that did occur can be viewed as a natural phenomenon among immigrant and minority peoples that has taken on a distinctive character among General Conference Mennonites in B.C. The relative compactness of the Lower Fraser Valley where the majority live, means the development of a critical

mass is not exclusively related to specific territory. Congregational groupings involve considerable geographic overlap and clustering around similar interests, backgrounds, language and theological orientation. The significance of alternate forms of clustering will become more evident later in the thesis. What is clear is that geography no longer serves as a single determinant of congregational membership as it had in the rural enclaves in Europe and the Canadian prairies. At the same time relatively dense concentrations continue to persist in the vicinity of churches in Clearbrook, and South Fraser and East Side of Vancouver (G1, G2, G10). For these people the emotional support and security of a tight knit church community remains an important factor (G16, G20).

The pattern of urbanization outlined earlier needs to be put in perspective here. For at least the middle and older General Conference Mennonites urbanization came about either from necessity or urban encroachment. The fact that they were initially reluctant participants in this process and had a traditional abhorrence of the city as worldly (G9) retarded their adaptation to urban life and created uneasiness and insecurity. This feeling was reinforced by their rural counterparts who were thought to represent the Mennonite ideal of 'separation from the world' ( G5; G16). This has been less of a problem for second generation General Conference Mennonites in Vancouver but continues to be an issue for those living in the urban sprawl in the Fraser Valley. Even though the area is essentially urban, parochial concerns and rural patterns of relationships persist and are seen as inadequate to accommodate the new urban context (G5; G15). The suggested resolution of the

situation has been to shed irrelevant aspects of the closed rural past, reorient the culture to the realities of a pluralistic, competitive and cosmopolitan urban life (G15) and accept this development as a kind of 'Diaspora' to help the Mennonite community become more socially and religiously relevant within the social context in which it currently finds itself (G27).

A third response to maintaining a critical mass is an effort to recover the Anabaptist understanding of community. This involves forming groups around mutual commitment to each other, the social geography in which they live and the environment (G14; G15; G16; G17). The emphasis is not so much on adaptation to modern society as it is on capturing the prophetic voice of radical Christian commitment within the contemporary environment as modeled by the early Anabaptist tradition (G17).

In summary, with the exception of the more recent refugees and immigrants the General Conference Mennonites brought no primordial identification with territory with them when they settled in B.C. Here, as they had done traditionally, they had to define their territory through negotiation with a host culture. In B.C. the traditional option did not materialize so that identification with territory has given rise to three orientations to the formation and maintenance of a critical mass which are held in tension within the General Conference community as a whole and in individual congregations (G9; G20). These are the attempt to replicate as fully as possible the traditional total communities centered around church life, to adapt to urbanization and modernity in an effort to retain social and religious relevance in a competitive and pluralist

society, and to revitalize the Anabaptist understanding of community. All three orientations seek to reconstruct a distinct way of life and differ mainly in the degree to which they look to history to inform contemporary practice. Partly by choice and partly by circumstance, General Conference Mennonites in B.C. have become a more open community as seen from the incorporation of non-traditional congregations, increased emphasis on evangelism, church growth, and holistic community involvement.

### **Identification with Institutions: Attempting Institutional Completeness**

"The rationale for institutional completeness is that when a minority can develop a social system of its own with control over its institutions, the social action patterns of the group will take place largely within the system." (Driedger & Harder, 1990: 172)

This statement refers to the exercise of group control of cultural boundaries by developing institutional independence to increase cultural autonomy and reinforce a distinctive identity. At the very least minority institutions provide concrete referents for identification. Following Breton (1964), Driedger suggests religious, education and welfare institutions are crucial. Mennonites in the Dutch-Prussian-Russian tradition came to B.C. with considerable experience and expertise with institutional development from the 'Mennonite Commonwealth' era in Russia. As noted earlier they were quick to replicate many of these institutions in B.C. Religious life, mutual aid, education, medical services, religious education, cooperatives and provincial Conferences were formally organized in the first decade (1928-1938). The following

is a brief description of each of the institutions highlighted in the interviews.

The **family** is not an institution included in Driedger's suggestions but received considerable attention in the interviews so that its role as a primary organizational structure underpinning Mennonite culture deserves mention. The following are representative of the statements made by the subjects interviewed.

- G1 "Families are a strong focus."  
G2 "The family is very important at least for the people that we hang around with. That is the number one priority, doing things together and keeping it strong."  
G6 "I think we have some young people who see some uniqueness in terms of the Mennonite family. At that point some of them are prepared to say, "I am Mennonite because I am part of a Mennonite family and . . . belong to a Mennonite church."  
G10 "I tested the values of my family a few times but I think I maintained the family values in the end."  
G15 The family to a large degree is a strong institution. In this church there aren't a lot of people that don't come from solid families and solid family backgrounds. The parents are together.  
G24 "There's a strong sense . . . of having the children around and a strong control network in that there is some fear that the children shouldn't have to suffer as they have suffered. That is the mentality."  
G26 "I grew up believing that my biggest mission in life was to help mom. . . . (After mother's death) It was assumed that I would stay home but I did make that choice too. I definitely felt obligated."

These quotations illustrate the importance of the family to General Conference Mennonites for the socialization of children and individual self-definition (G1, G2, G10, G15). There is considerable family loyalty (G6, G26) bordering on clannishness at times (G24). Probably, similar to most immigrant communities, General Conference Mennonites have a strong future orientation directed at providing for the education and financial security of their children (G3, G24).



## Religious Institutions

**Table 8. Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia Churches and Other Conference Affiliations.**

Year	Name	Location	CMC	GC
1931	First Mennonite	Greendale	M	M
1935	First United Mennonite	Vancouver	M	M
1936	Bethel Mennonite	Aldergrove	M	M
1936	West Abbotsford Mennonite	Abbotsford	M	M
1937	United Mennonite	Black Creek	M	
1938	Oliver Mennonite*	Oliver		
1938	Yarrow Mennonite	Yarrow	M	M
1940	Cedar Valley Mennonite	Mission	M	M
1945	Eden Mennonite	Chilliwack	M	M
1946	Cedar Hills Mennonite	Surrey	M	M
1947	First Mennonite	Kelowna	M	M
1947	Chilliwack First*	Chilliwack		
1952	Clearbrook Mennonite	Clearbrook	M	M
1952	Peardonville Mennonite*	Abbotsford		
1956	Mountainview Mennonite	Vancouver	M	M
1959	First Mennonite	Burns Lake	M	M
1960	Olivet Mennonite	Clearbrook	M	M
1961	Kelowna Gospel Fellowship	Kelowna	M	
1963	Eben-Ezer Mennonite	Clearbrook	M	M
1963	Prince of Peace Mennonite**	Richmond		
1964	Flat Rock Mennonite	Cecil Lake	M	
1968	Sherbrooke Mennonite	Vancouver	M	M
1978	Vancouver Chinese Mennonite	Vancouver	M	M
1979	Church of the Way	Granisle	R	
1979	Langley Mennonite Fellowship	Langley	M	M
1980	Mennonite Church of Vernon	Vernon	M	
1980	Peace Mennonite	Richmond	M	M
1980	Emmanuel Mennonite	Clearbrook	M	M
1983	Grace Chinese Mennonite	Vancouver	R	
1988	Lao Christian Church	Clearbrook	R	
1989	Peace Chinese Mennonite	Richmond	R	
1992	First United Spanish Mennonite	Vancouver		
1992	Glenmore Christian Fellowship	Kelowna		
1992	Port Hardy Fellowship	Port Hardy		
1992	Punjabi Mennonite Fellowship	Vancouver		
1992	Surrey Mennonite Fellowship	Surrey		
1992	Wellspring Mennonite Church	Clearbrook		
1992	Point Grey Fellowship ***	Vancouver		

\* Churches which were dissolved

\*\* Prince of Peace Mennonite gave leadership to the formation of Peace Mennonite

\*\*\* Point Grey Fellowship is dually affiliated with the Mennonite Brethren Conference

M=Member Status

R=Related Status

(Lehn, 1990; Handbook of Information, 1991; CMC Yearbook, 1991)

As described earlier, the initial institutional concern of the *Kirchliche* Mennonites coming to the province was the church. It continues as the main institution defining General Conference Mennonites in B.C.

While the churches have also experienced a waning of commitment and a pronounced consumer orientation as outlined by Bibby (1987), the General Conference congregational polity and strong emphasis on adult baptism and membership continues to provide a distinct identity for those who join (G15; G20). Identification with the General Conference church reflected in the interviews shows that alongside evidence of traditional commitment and loyalty considerable ambivalence and disaffection has also developed. There is strong support for a theology which embraces a dynamic relationship between faith and action reflected in a high involvement in volunteerism, MCC and local social programs (mediation, social services, Victim Offender Ministries, food banks, social housing etc.) (G1; G4; G7; G10; G15; G16; G17; G20; G24; G25). The uneasiness, in part, has to do with the insecurity and tension associated with rapid urbanization and a perceived inadequacy and inferiority in General Conference churches about the sufficiency of their response to the religious climate of B.C. Cited most often is a desire to emulate the Mennonite Brethren who are seen to have made the transition more successfully measured by their rapid growth in the last decade (G7; G9; G12; G15; G16; G21)<sup>25</sup>. This desire is the

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<sup>25</sup> The Mennonite Brethren Church in B.C. has adopted the church growth model developed at Fuller Theological Seminary. Their efforts have resulted in the building of mega-churches and developing 'seeker friendly' services. The Northview Church in Clearbrook was given some attention in the observations because it surfaced in more than half of the interviews. The church has imported a minister who is California

product of a sense of inferiority (G10), Mennonite Brethren recruitment among *Kirchliche* (G4; G10; G12) and a pervading evangelical ideology that negates the significance of denominational distinctions (G2; G13; G22). These factors have resulted in a significant drift of General Conference Mennonite members and a pronounced movement of the children of members not only in the direction of the Mennonite Brethren Church but also to the Alliance, Evangelical Free and Baptist churches and, more recently, the Vineyard Movement (G10; G12; G23). These groups represent a clustering of evangelical churches within which persons are free to circulate as religious consumers. In the more radical of these churches the program has taken on the character of a competitive marketplace. General Conference churches have resisted this trend and seem bland and uninviting to themselves and outsiders, by comparison.

Identification with the **Conference of Mennonites in Canada** and the **General Conference Mennonite Church** has undergone a significant change in the last twenty years. The stronger emphasis on congregational autonomy and provincially controlled programming has resulted in a reduction of visibility for the other levels of Conference in the province. Several of the subjects interviewed saw the national and international levels of Conference becoming weaker as denominational structures continue to lose significance at the congregational level. They suggest

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trained and acts as the chief executive officer. He works with a board of elders who are committed to board solidarity. There are three full services every weekend which use employ drama, rock music, clowns etc. Judging from the services attended the theology is ultra-conservative with a Hollywood image.

attention and resources will be increasingly redirected to support local initiatives as the General Conference Mennonites succumb to the encroachment of North American Evangelicalism. The **Conference of Mennonites in B.C.** is seen as having the potential for staying relevant in some form because of its accessibility and visibility in the province (G4; G5). Continuing support for exclusively Conference institutions comes from mainly two sources; loyalties developed through experience and meaningful networks of associations, and as a significant expression of identification and solidarity with the larger Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition (G1; G7; G16; G21; G27).

### **Educational Institutions**

An institution many Mennonites in the Clearbrook area identify with is the **Mennonite Educational Institute** which has been a landmark since 1944. Alumni interviewed for this study stated that their parents and peers assumed they would attend once they reached high school age (G10, G12, G23).

The school is operated by a society involving eight Mennonite Brethren and five General Conference churches (Mennonite Reporter, Vol. 23: No.3, Feb. 8, 93: 5). The school teaches the provincial curriculum for grades eight to twelve supplemented with compulsory Bible classes. In the upper grades students are required to take four semester modules of Anabaptist studies (G3). The enrollment in September 1991 stood at 675 (M.E.I. Board Meeting Minutes, 91-13). The school is progressing and plans to expand to

include grades kindergarten to seven with a projected enrollment of four hundred.

Judging from the extensive capital investment involved and a growing enrollment the school enjoys strong support in the local Mennonite constituency. However, it does have its detractors who question its legitimacy as a Mennonite institution. The main difficulty revolves around the religious orientation which reflects the strong influence of North American Evangelical movements at the expense of a distinct Anabaptist-Mennonite identity (G4; G6; G10; G21). This influence is seen in the M.E.I. Board Meeting Minutes. The minutes report a teacher being disqualified from teaching Bible at the school because his views on "hell and eternal punishment" were judged to be doctrinally "on the fringe" (90-39) and another teacher who was commended for presenting "a fine Christian model and teaches Creation Science in his Biology and Science classes." (90-45) Another consistent comment in the interviews concerned the school's identification with upper class values. Former students expressed a frustration with a materialistic atmosphere which they felt made unrealistic demands of them and detracted from the ethical and social concerns in traditional Mennonitism and Anabaptism as they understood them (G10; G12; G23). A final concern was that the student body was too homogeneous for developing strong Mennonite identities in individual students (G2; G10). This refers to the development of an assumed Mennonite identity that lacks clear definition. Students are seen as too sheltered from other value systems to make meaningful choices.

**Columbia Bible College** is a degree granting Bible College accredited by the American Association of Bible Colleges and operated under the Columbia Bible College Society. The Society was formed to merge the campuses and programs of the Bible schools of each Conference and is owned jointly by the Conference of Mennonites in B.C. and the British Columbia Mennonite Brethren Conference. The campus is situated in Clearbrook and since the fall of 1992 also houses the offices of both Conferences. The president's report to the Conferences in 1992 listed an enrollment of two hundred and six full-time equivalent students of which ninety-one were Mennonite Brethren and fifty-nine were General Conference.

General Conference Mennonites in B.C. have put considerable energy and resources into this school but continue to be divided in their assessment of how accurately it reflects their tradition. It must be noted that the merging of the two schools occurred partly for pragmatic reasons and was facilitated by the General Conference tradition of tolerance (G9; G13; G21; S2). For some having joint ownership of the school was appealing as a demonstration of Christian unity (G2; G3), others saw it as an opportunity to capture some of the "evangelistic fervor" and "Being more up front about our faith and more expressive" which General Conference churches were perceived to lack (G13). The assumption was that the General Conference would contribute its stronger emphasis on ethics and social action. The latter has not developed as clearly as the former and no forum has developed to ensure this will happen. An undercurrent of critique has developed that questions the extent to which the theology of the school adequately represents the more

holistic approach to Biblical interpretation within the Anabaptist hermeneutical tradition ( G4; G6; G7; G21). This hesitation to give unqualified endorsement to the school as 'our school' indicates that some General Conference Mennonites reluctantly identify with the school and see it as a liability to the formation of a clear Mennonite-Anabaptist identity among General Conference students.

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada operates a national Bible College in Winnipeg. The **Canadian Mennonite Bible College** is a degree granting institution which is registered as a teaching center of the University of Manitoba. Its three year program offers degrees in Christian Education, Church Music and Theology. It is also a partner in a Seminary Consortium in Winnipeg which offers a Masters of Divinity program. The curriculum has a strong emphasis on Anabaptist theology, Christian ethics and practical theology. The 1991-1992 enrollment was one hundred and eighty-nine full-time and thirty-four part-time students (CMC Report, 1992). The school attracts a handful of students from B.C. each year (5-12) but has a significant influence in the province as a source of clergy. Twelve of the twenty-two leading clergy in B.C. have studied at the school (CMC Yearbook, 1991). Alumni included in this study valued the broader theological orientation of the school and the emphasis on the relationship between belief, ethics and action. They report that the atmosphere was more open and non-threatening than their experience in B.C. institutions which they felt emphasized conformity too strongly (G10; G12; G17; G23; G24). Others have characterized the school as too liberal, too academic or out of touch with local congregational needs (G12; G13). Despite the

low participation rate General Conference Mennonites in B.C. consider the college 'their school' as indicated by the contribution of approximately \$150,000 towards the operating budget in 1991 (CMC Yearbook, 1991) and statements to that effect in the interviews (G7; G9, G16; G21).

The General Conference Mennonite Church is a partner in the **Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries** in Elkhart, Indiana. The school is a post graduate theological institution operated jointly with the Mennonite Church, the largest Mennonite Conference in North America with 102,276 members concentrated in the Eastern United States (Goetz-Lichdi, 1990: 413). Six of the ministers and associate ministers in B.C. listed in the 1991 CMC Yearbook have attended AMBS. Since the school is not very accessible to B.C. the Seminary cooperates in a program of Conference based education which offers credit courses locally towards a degree program or as continuing education for ministers. The school has limited visibility in B.C. because of its specialized nature but is accepted as the Seminary with which General Conference Mennonites in B.C. most closely identify.

### **Welfare Institutions**

As noted earlier the Anabaptist tradition contained a pronounced communitarian emphasis expressed in the 'community of goods.' In B.C. this position was first expressed in the formation of mutual aid societies such as the Bethesda Mennonite Health Society and a Board of General Welfare and Immigration. The former was dissolved with the introduction of a national health plan and the



latter served as the forerunner of the current **Mennonite Central Committee B.C.** General Conference Mennonites identify strongly with the MCC program both as volunteers and in donations partly because of the role the institution had in the post WWII and Southeast Asian immigration but also because of a belief in a direct relationship between faith, ethics and action. This organization is involved in a range of education, health care, agriculture, community development, social work and relief programs in B.C. and through its national and international counterparts in seventy countries around the world. Between 1948 and 1989 a total of four hundred and seventy-two full-time volunteers representing a total of one thousand six hundred and ninety-nine years of service in various MCC projects have come from B.C. (Lescheid, 1989). In addition local volunteers run seven thrift and self-help craft stores, two used furniture and appliance outlets and an annual relief sale.

In terms of institutional identification, MCC is the least controversial expression of the tradition that enjoys broad support from all Mennonites in the province (G1; G2; G5; G6; G7; G10; G15; G16; G18; G21). The only resistance identified in the interviews involved MCC involvement in peace and social concerns. The firm position on non-resistance and involvement in peace activities as well as a too empathic attitude towards social issues such as offender ministries, abortion, AIDS are seen to detract from the image some Mennonites want to project in society (G16; S1).

As regards the care of the elderly, General Conference Mennonites in B.C. identify most directly with the Menno Home run by the **Mennonite Benevolent Society** formed in 1953. The society

is operated by an inter-Mennonite board but is dominated by General Conference Mennonites since the Mennonite Brethren operate a separate care facility. The complex on Marshall road near Clearbrook provides services ranging from independent living to palliative care (G27).

### **Identification with Cultural Inventory: Replication, Adaptation and Borrowing**

Following Kurt Lewin (1948) Driedger assumes that the development of identification with heritage and culture is important for a sense of well-being and belonging for members within a minority group and can be most effectively achieved within a concentrated territory containing separate institutions (Driedger, 1990: 172-173). As was outlined earlier, B.C. did not provide the ideal conditions for replicating Russian Mennonite culture. The resulting mixture of limited replication, cultural production and reproduction including extensive borrowing has resulted in a "smorgasbord" culture without a consistent inventory of cultural traits which can be identified as exclusively Mennonite (G20). While some of the cultural artifacts such as foods, music and crafts remain, Mennonite culture has become increasingly invisible (G6; G9; G16; G20; G21). The factors contributing to this fragmentation include urbanization (G22), high mobility resulting in greater detachment, independence and individualism (G6; G22), rapid economic mobility (G4), expanded choices especially for the young (G20), a negation of culture, Mennonite culture as an impediment to social acceptability (G12; G16), educational disparity between generations (G21), and the development of a dichotomy between

faith and action (G2; G18). However, some general observations can be made.

The significance of languages of origin is related to the extent to which persons identify with their history and tradition. Among General Conference Mennonites in B.C. some identification with the German language extends to second and third generation members born in Canada (G21). A lingering issue revolves around the retention or rejection of the German language. For example the Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church broke with the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church over the introduction of English in the worship services in 1963. Seventeen years later the Emmanuel Mennonite Church left Eben-Ezer over the same issue, this time to form an exclusively English congregation. While variations of this pattern have been replicated in other instances, most congregations resolved the issue by introducing bi-lingual services. First United, Eben-Ezer, Clearbrook, Eden, West Abbotsford, Greendale, Bethel and Kelowna First are fully bi-lingual. Language is also an intergenerational issue for the Chinese and Southeast Asian churches (G20). Vancouver Chinese Mennonite church, the oldest and largest of these churches, has taken the innovative step of dividing into Cantonese, Mandarin and English speaking groupings under a single umbrella. The central concern was to provide for the different language needs of members without dividing the congregation (G19).

The more open nature of the Mennonite community is reflected in a change of marriage patterns. While endogamous marriages are still given preference, exogamous marriages are also seen as

acceptable within certain parameters, the main criterion being that both partners are believers (G2; G6; G15; G18; G20; G21). More specifically, marriages between General Conference Mennonites and Baptists, Mennonite Brethren and Alliance are becoming more common and unproblematic but the level of discomfort grows in marriages involving partners from United Church, Roman Catholic Anglican or other high church traditions (G6; G20).

In terms of friendship patterns the middle and older generation has retained its strong loyalty to the local church and limits its social activities mainly to this community (G6; G15; G21). While primary friendships of the younger generation still form within the context of family relationships, the church and in some cases Mennonite educational institutions, their relationships tend to be broader and extend beyond the church community (G2; G3; G6; G20).

General Conference Mennonites with few exceptions came into the province as agriculturalists even though they brought other skills with them. Farming suited their purposes because it was the least regulated industry and provided for maximum autonomy. From the beginning they were forced to diversify their occupational pursuits and can now be found throughout the economy. A survey of the chief occupations of four hundred and two members taken from the current directories of West Abbotsford and Bethel Mennonite Church, two semi-rural churches, and Mountainview Mennonite Church in Vancouver reflect this diversity. The classifications come from Kauffman and Driedger's (1989) questionnaire on which the book The Mennonite Mosaic (1991) is based and are adjusted to allow

for a comparison with five Mennonite denominations and the total B.C. population.

**Table 9. General Conference Occupational Profile Compared to Five Mennonite Denominations and the B.C. Workforce Given in %**

Classification	GC Mennonites in B.C.	All Mennonites	B.C. Population
01 farmer or farm management, fisheries etc.	12	08	05
02 proprietor, manager or official (business owner or operator, department manager, official of public or private business or agency, etc.)	12	10	09
03 professional or technical worker (minister, physician, teacher, social worker, engineer, librarian, educator, editor, scientist, etc.)	20	29	10
04 clerical or sales worker (office worker, clerk, salesperson, postal worker, etc.)	08	11	27
05 craftsman or foreman (carpenter, mechanic, die cutter, tailor, etc.)	07	05	08
06 machine operator (truck or bus driver, press operator, welder, seamstress, factory worker, etc.)	06	04	12
07 service worker (barber, beautician, cook, guard, policeperson, restaurant waiter, fireman, janitor, etc.)	05	04	15
08 laborer (farm laborer, construction work, helper, car washer, etc.)	02	01	01
09 single income families	20	24	09 *
10 student	08	04	04
	100%	100%	100%

(West Abbotsford, Bethel, Mountainview Mennonite Church Directories; Kauffman & Driedger Questionnaire, 1989; Census Canada 1991)

\*This was given as a projection since income data was not available at the time of writing.

A comparison of 1991 Census figures indicates that while General Conference Mennonites in B.C. are over-represented in agriculture in comparison to all Mennonites and the general population, it has been replaced by the professions as the dominant occupational pursuit. There is also an over-representation in the proprietor category and a significantly lower participation rate in the clerical, machine operator and service worker sectors. While the percentage of single

income families is lower than the Mennonite average it more than double the rate in the B.C. population. This confirms the emphasis on the family documented earlier.

Mennonite economic mobility is a fairly recent phenomenon so all of its ramifications are not clear. General Conference Mennonites pride themselves on their strong work ethic, honesty and simple lifestyle which is seen as a recipe for "getting ahead" (G2). Others claim, "If we have been given this gift of making money then we should use it . . ." (G24) Regardless of how ethnocentric and egocentric these statements sound, the reality is that Mennonites have found financial success in the B.C. economy. This success can be partly attributed to intensive Mennonite involvement in real estate and development in the Lower Mainland as the city encroached on their rural holdings (G16).<sup>26</sup>

At this point the economic mobility has not resulted in a clearly defined economic elite or pronounced class distinctions as had occurred in Russia. One inconclusive change evident is a greater reliance on major donors to support Mennonite institutions. Among the General Conference Mennonites a group called the "Friends of the Conference" has recently formed for the purpose of underwriting selected institutions and programs. At the same time General Conference Mennonites in B.C. have shed their historic image as

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<sup>26</sup> The volatility of the real estate market in the Lower Fraser Valley is illustrated by the fact that Mennonites purchased land in the Abbotsford area for as little as \$10 an acre in the 1930s. By the 1950s the price had risen to \$1,000 an acre and presently ranges from \$60,000 to \$100,000 an acre depending on the location and zoning. In the past thirty years Mennonite companies such as Block Brothers and Wall & Redekop as well as smaller independent firms have capitalized on the rapidly expanding real estate market and construction boom. Individuals too found that their subsistence farm holdings (5-10 acres) had suddenly become valuable assets.

undesirable economic migrants or destitute refugees and emerged as an affluent community. In this one instance they have been able to replicate the 'golden era' which they enjoyed in the Mennonite 'commonwealth' in Russia.

## **Discussion**

It can logically be assumed that a minority culture could more easily and effectively develop and maintain distinct institutions and cultural inventory within an exclusive territory. Conversely, it follows that identification with these unique institutions and cultural inventory would be more likely to occur because of accessibility, high visibility and natural loyalties within a bounded area over which the culture exercises control. Compliance with group values in such a pattern can be more effectively managed through social sanctions. However, these are ideal conditions which the General Conference Mennonites were unable to achieve when they established themselves in the province. Even where they were able to settle in significant clusters (Yarrow, Sardis, Clearbrook, Vancouver) they were exposed to co-religionists, other Canadians and a variety of equally visible and accessible institutions. The shift from total to open communities without a clearly identified territory means that General Conference culture no longer has exclusive jurisdiction over the choices available to its members. In this pluralistic context members are free to exercise increasingly individualistic choices as the community loses many of its mechanisms to ensure conformity.

The consequences of this shift are illustrated in the interviews. A redefinition of identification with territory, institutions and cultural inventory is indicated. The majority of the Mennonite institutions present in the Clearbrook cluster exist on a broader inter-Mennonite base in which General Conference Mennonites are seen as junior partners. The element of increased choice is reflected in the variety of approaches that have been taken in response to change. While the General Conference Mennonite Church founding principle of, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty." (Krehbiel, 1898: 58-59) has allowed diverse Mennonites to unite under one umbrella, the risk of polarizing on issues of substance also exists as independent individual choices and corporate decisions by autonomous churches move further away from a unified core. Certainly, General Conference identity cannot rely on territorial boundedness, institutional completeness and a distinct cultural inventory to provide much of the glue to hold together a 'whole way of life' that is distinctly their own.



## **CHAPTER 6 - SYMBOLIC IDENTIFICATION IN MINORITY CULTURES: IDENTITY BELOW THE SURFACE**

"For me the important thing in being Mennonite would be the mission principle. By this I mean the urgency of propagating the Christian faith. This is what the early Anabaptists did. It is important the next generation keep the faith in Jesus Christ." (L4)

The quote comes from the life history of a senior whose memories date back to the turn of the century. It captures his identification with the Anabaptist tradition and his understanding of its central tenets. Elsewhere he laments the decline of traditional authority structures which served his generation. These interrelated issues of history, ideology and authority are the focus of this chapter.

### **Identification with Historical Symbols: Foundation or Problem**

Driedger states that, "knowledge of their origins and pride in their heritage would seem to be essential for a sense of purpose and direction among minority urbanites. Without such pride and knowledge the desire to perpetuate tradition rapidly diminishes." (Driedger, 1990: 173) While the interviews confirm this statement they also illustrate the complexity involved since 'history' and 'tradition' are essentially a reinvention of the past and 'knowledge' and 'pride' are subject to processes of selection. For example, it would be easy to characterize Menno Simons, the best known early Anabaptist, as either a radical social activist or the sixteenth century equivalent of a North American evangelist.

General Conference Mennonite identification with historical symbols is not unitary. In broad categories they divide into

identification with the tradition through recalling personal experiences, identification with the total historical tradition with an emphasis on its origins, redefining the tradition to accommodate modern influences and rejecting the relevance of the tradition altogether.

The personal experiences with which General Conference Mennonites most closely identify reach back to the prosperous Mennonite 'commonwealth' in Russia which in 1917 had a population of approximately one hundred and ten thousand in three hundred and eighty-seven villages owning a total of two million eight hundred and eighty-eight thousand and three hundred and seventeen acres of land excluding villages in Asia and private estates. They also held a monopoly in the milling industry and produced 6% of the nation's farm machinery. The 'commonwealth' had established four hundred elementary schools, thirteen high schools, two girl's schools, a teachers college, two four-year trade schools, one eight year business college, one school for the deaf and dumb, one nursing school, a Bible school, several hospitals and a mental institution (Epp, 1971: 285). Mennonites took pride in their achievements as a total community (L1; L2; L3). Even the landless among them who benefited the least from these developments credit their more limited successes to sharing in the community's values of hard work, thrift and sense of moral superiority (L1).

A more tragic identification with the Russian period began with the anarchy and civil war following WWI and the determined imposition of Communist rule. These developments involved a dramatic change in status from being seen as a national asset to

being treated as a liability. This change prompted the largest exodus of Mennonites from Russian soil between 1923 and 1930. As documented elsewhere, their main destination was Canada (L1; L2). This was followed by the enforced collectivization of agriculture, an artificially induced famine and recurring purges during the Stalinist era. The remaining Mennonites were reduced to a demoralized minority stripped of their land base, leaders, institutions and a large proportion of their male population. The few that made it to the west in the aftermath of WWII contained an over-representation of women with dependent children (L3). These memories have been reinforced for those who experienced them and for the entire Mennonite community by the recent emigration of large numbers of Soviet Mennonites to Germany and the resulting reunification of families this made possible. Each year the Mennonite survivors in B.C. hold a commemoration service to remember this period in their history (G21).

General Conference Mennonites remember their Russian history both as a pinnacle in their achievements as a people but also as a repressive period punctuated with 'exodus' type experiences. In the latter there is a striking resemblance between this history and many of the recent immigrants from Southeast Asia and Central America who have joined the General Conference Mennonites (G1; G14; G19).

For both the *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* Mennonites represented among the General Conference Mennonites in B.C. the depression and war years in the 1930s and 1940s are remembered for the intense economic struggle for survival combined with a debate over the community's preservation of their traditional position of radical

pacifism. Each family has its share of hard luck stories to tell about the depression. Many lost (L1; L2; G11) or abandoned farms on the prairies (L4; G9; G21; G22) or were able to eke out a subsistence livelihood (L5; G8). For many, fortunes did not improve until well into the 1950s.

The debate over Mennonite participation in Canada's war effort has been documented elsewhere. The community was deeply divided on the issue with some volunteering for military service, others accepting the draft outright, still others accepting the draft but intending to join the medical corps and a group insisting on conscientious objector (CO) status and serving in alternative service projects mainly in forestry (G20; G21). A group of former COs held a reunion in the fall of 1992 including a symbolic harvesting of trees they had planted on Vancouver Island during the war. Identification with this part of the history is still controversial in the community as reflected in the interviews and life histories (L2; L4; G16; G17). Kauffman and Driedger found that only 65% of all General Conference Mennonites in North America still held the traditional non-resistant position (1991: 174).

These historical symbols of identification are strongest for those who experienced them directly but serve as reference points for succeeding generations who are showing a keen interest in their parents and grandparent's roots. Four of the life histories included in the information examined for this thesis were prompted by requests from children and grandchildren (L1; L2; L3; L4).

However, this history is not as significant or accessible to all General Conference Mennonites in the province. The gap has been

filled for some by identifying more closely with the total history of the tradition with an emphasis on sixteenth century Anabaptism as a normative model. Historical continuity of Mennonites with this tradition appears to have been more assumed than understood until recently. The process of defining Anabaptism more closely has been assisted by the work of H.S. Bender, a Mennonite historian, culminating in his presidential address to the American Society of Church History in 1943 entitled "The Anabaptist Vision." Though based on limited sources and selective in its approach his paper offered an important correction to traditional Anabaptist scholarship limited to the writings of their sixteenth century detractors such as Luther, Zwingli and the Catholic church or idealized by Hegel and Marx who focused exclusively on the Muensterites, a radical fringe group of Anabaptists. Bender's work founded a new school of scholarship among his colleagues and students which has uncovered and analyzed a wealth of reformation documentation to shed new light on the place and significance of the movement within the history of sixteenth century Europe (S3; S4). For some General Conference Mennonites in the province the reorientation of the Mennonite tradition to its more radical prophetic, activist and communitarian Anabaptist roots grounded in Christian orthodoxy, ethics and action is the most appropriate response to modernity (G4; G7; G10; G16; G17; G20; G23). However, for others this history is either too distant or inaccessible to be meaningful beyond those elements that have filtered into contemporary practice but which are not always clearly understood as Anabaptist (G8; G11). Even those who understand and identify

with these roots are sometimes selective in applying Anabaptism in contemporary practice (G13; G18).

Under the influence of pietism, fundamentalism, dispensationalism and denominationalism many General Conference Mennonites in B.C. have chosen to identify more selectively with the religious concerns expressed in historic Anabaptism. Particular attention is given to the early period in which the movement experienced considerable response to their evangelical and communitarian message. The part of this message that has currency for this group is the emphasis on conversion, adult baptism and personal piety. This selectivity redefines Anabaptism in North American Evangelical terms and marginalizes many of its ethical and communitarian distinctives (G4; G6; G7; G16; G17).

The influence for understanding Anabaptism in these narrow terms is a product of Mennonite efforts to accommodate North American religious developments in B.C. To a large extent it comes through an association with the Mennonite Brethren with whom General Conference Mennonites share a number of key institutions and who according to John Schmidt (1991) have more decidedly embraced North American Evangelicalism.

There is also evidence of an ahistorical position taken by General Conference Mennonites which if not totally negating, downplays the significance of their Mennonite-Anabaptist roots (G6; G11; G22). The concern expressed is that emphasizing a singular history and culture makes the community too insular and inaccessible to persons from other traditions and denies the universality of the Christian church (G18). The more extreme

ahistorical position attributes little or no significance to history in general and posits a radical futuristic orientation in its place. One informant summarized the pragmatic side of this position in the statement, "I sense that historical symbols, and the placing a value on them, are seen as an impediment. You trip up on those things. You can't get ahead by looking back." (G16) On a theological level this group's future orientation is influenced by a strong eschatological emphasis (G22)<sup>27</sup>.

General Conference Mennonite identification with history spans the entire spectrum from intense identification with Anabaptist-Mennonite historical symbols either from personal experience or through intellectual appropriation, to a total denial of any historical significance. In between people identify either formally or informally with selected aspects of this history. The debate within the community can be characterized as being over the extent to which historical symbols are accessible and relevant to contemporary practice.

### **Identification with Ideology: Economics, Politics and Religion**

Following Williams, ideology is used as the world-view or general perspective "which will include formal and conscious beliefs but also less conscious, less formulated attitudes, habits and feelings, or even unconscious assumptions, bearings and

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<sup>27</sup> One of the features of the conservative theology in North American Evangelicalism is an inordinate preoccupation with the end times and the second coming of Christ. This future orientation overshadows the significance of history and is carried over into practise.

commitments." (1981:26). Ideology is seen as akin to the informing and constituting spirit indicative of culture 'as it is being lived' and not the negative connotation usually associated with the use of the term. To create more clarity this section is divided into religious, political and economic categories evident in the comprehensive concerns that gave rise to the Anabaptist movement. It is understood that now, as it was in the sixteenth century, these elements are integrated in the ideology of the culture.

### **Economic Ideology**

General Conference Mennonites in B.C. identify with the communitarian approach to economics within the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition as seen in references to the Old Testament imagery of Jubilee and Sabbath years (G7; G16) and expressed concretely by strong support for MCC and high involvement in social programs as volunteers and professionals. However, this perspective no longer informs their economic ideology exclusively. Alongside the earlier theological perspective a number of more pragmatic considerations emerged in the interviews.

The most simplistic of these is the first generation immigrant preoccupation with 'getting ahead' and ensuring their children will not need to suffer and struggle as they did (G2; G6; G24). A significant part of 'getting ahead' has to do with maximizing personal autonomy and avoiding class struggle (G2; G6; G24). This tendency is reflected in the over-representation in agriculture and the professions documented in the last chapter. Economic success is seen as the natural outcome of a Christian lifestyle characterized by



hard work, frugality, honesty and simple living (G2; G15; G18) described as being 'inbred' in first generation Mennonites and passed on to the next generation (G15). In this view material success is synonymous with being a good Mennonite and finding favor with God (G18).

While this ideology may provide an adequate rationale for some, others view this position more critically. They accept that the Mennonite work ethic is a contributing factor but add that inflation in the real estate market is likely the main factor in the rapid upward mobility Mennonites have experienced in B.C. (G16; G18).

The interviews indicate an inordinate drive to achieve financial success (G4; G16; G18; G24) fueled by high community expectations (G4; G23). The reasons behind this position cited in the interviews are a natural first immigrant drive (G4), B.C.'s competitive frontier mentality (G6), 'angst' about personal adequacy (G6), over-compensation to overcome inferiority status as a minority (G16) and a desire to control their environment in a rapidly changing world (G4; G24). Without the support of similar buoyant economic conditions young families are having to cope as best they can with continuing high economic expectations (G4; G6). While many are able to manage by developing two full-time careers or developing small enterprises alongside a career some resort to impression management as a way of coping with community expectations (G16; G20).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> An example of this was given by one of the informants. He stated that young families concentrated on the two main symbols of success; a new house and a late model car. He

Mennonite primary involvement in agriculture which provided a unifying influence in the past, has been replaced by occupational diversity. While they generally reflect middle class values there is evidence of the communitarian idealism of early Anabaptism in institutional form and in the preference for occupations that avoid class conflict in society. While class distinctions have emerged within the group and were particularly pronounced during the 'commonwealth' era these have been mediated by the group's emphasis on the principle of mutual aid. This is most clearly illustrated by the continuous efforts at collectively purchasing land for daughter colonies to provide the landless persons among them with their own means of production. The current economic ideologies and practices that have developed are not entirely surprising given precedents set during the Russian period and relatively recent immigrant experience. B.C. provided the opportunity for a return to the comforts, security and sense of control associated with affluence.

### **Political Ideology**

Direct involvement in the political processes within a host state has not been an significant issue for Mennonites of the Dutch-Prussian-Russian tradition until recently. Historically the primary objectives were to obtain land and conditions that would allow for the continuity of their tradition without state interference. From the sixteenth century on, their citizenship status has been subject

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found that many of them could not afford to furnish the homes or actually own the cars but found it important to keep up appearances and fit in (G20).

to manipulation in the interests of the host government. On the one hand Mennonites saw themselves as 'citizens of heaven' and therefore ambivalent about 'earthly' citizenship and on the other host societies regularly changed citizenship status as a way of circumventing the promises made to the Mennonites and pressuring them into conformity.

One way the government of B.C. expressed its resistance to Mennonite settlement in the province was to remove their right to vote between 1931 and 1948. As in the case of Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Doukhobors and Hutterites, this limited the province's obligation to acknowledge their interests and justified discriminatory public policies and practices. The fact that this pattern has repeated itself regularly throughout Mennonite history explains why few Mennonites in B.C. took note of the 1931 Order in Council and still harbor considerable suspicion about direct political involvement (G5). Mennonite political ideology needs to be understood against this background. At the same time the former apolitical position has given way to a variety of responses in B.C.

General Conference political ideology is viewed from several perspectives in the interviews. The first, has to do with the degree to which they participate in the formal political processes of the state. In this regard they can no longer be seen as the *die Stillen im Lande* (the quiet in the land) who refuse participation based on the traditional principle of total separation between church and state. While there have been no formal restrictions imposed on members, the informal understanding is that persons avoid participation in party politics. The objection is to the nature of political

compromise and the necessity of party solidarity which jeopardizes the exercise of the freedom of conscience (G20; G15; S3). Running as an independent candidate is seen as the only appropriate alternative (S3). This is amenable to political office at the local level but rare at the provincial and national level (G24). At the same time there is a growing attitude that this position is politically naive. The rationale expressed was that, "If we are not in the position of influencing people then we can only be the people being led or oppressed." (G1). The view is that as a Christian influence in society Mennonites should be more politically engaged to ensure that 'Kingdom' (of God) values are represented in the political process and reflected in public policy (G1; G2; L4).

Secondly, viewing Mennonite political involvement informally to include a broad range of relationships within society presents a different picture. One informant summarized Mennonite attitude as "The free enterprise, right wing politics is written in the pavement." (G6) He was referring to the replication of the historical practice of negotiating with host cultures to ensure conditions in which they could prosper. This radical observation is justified in light of the evidence of an inordinate drive for financial success noted earlier in the chapter. However, the position is more complex than the quote would indicate. Mennonites also support the status quo because it provides them a measure of political autonomy and lessens the occasion for government interference in their internal affairs (G20; G21). In this sense General Conference Mennonites can be seen as supporting free enterprise politics because it represents their best interests.

However, the right-wing label needs to be qualified since it is inconsistent with the strong emphasis on mutual aid, social programs and activism. At this point Mennonites have achieved middle class lifestyles without the social status generally associated with it. It is unclear whether they will be fully incorporated into the controlling economic elites which would naturally draw them into more formal political involvement. The determining factor in the final analysis may be the value they place on their political autonomy and capacity for independent action. In any case their political orientation will continue to be some blend of self-interest and altruism which confuses conventional political labels.

### **Religious Ideology**

An examination of the confessions contained in the constitutions of the three levels of Conference and several local congregations show that, like the Anabaptists before them, General Conference Mennonites do not represent a departure from Christian orthodoxy or an introduction of additional canonical texts. Along with most of Christendom they view "the Bible as the Word of God and the only trustworthy guide to faith and life." (CMC Constitution and Bylaws, 1988: 10) As the proliferation of Christian communions and denominations indicate this religious orientation alone does not ensure unity. As documented in chapter three the central concern within sixteenth century Anabaptism was not orthodoxy but an understanding of the personal and social ramifications of holding Christian beliefs. This proved to be an on-going internal debate as

seen in the early social activism in Europe giving way to rural quietism in Prussia, the development of total communities in Russia and social integration at present.

The following summary reflects the variety of responses to religious influences in Russia and North America that have shaped General Conference Mennonites' religious orientations in B.C. While these positions are represented as extremes in the analysis they commonly exist in a variety of configurations in practice.

*Kirchliche* Mennonites arriving in B.C. had already been exposed to Lutheran pietism, Baptist revivalism and Moravian missionizing through their association with other German colonists during the Russian period. In North America they associated with the General Conference Mennonite Church which had been influenced by denominationalism, dispensationalism, fundamentalism and the more contemporary expression in evangelicalism. In more recent times the Jesus Movement, the Charismatic Movement, and the Vineyard Movement have particularly influenced General Conference Mennonites in B.C. Further influences have come via para-church and non-denominational organizations and institutions which promote narrowly defined theological orientations without accountability to church or denominational structures which by nature represent a more comprehensive theology.

The extent to which these influences have been rejected, absorbed or adapted by General Conference churches is determined by factors such as congregational autonomy, lack of central authority structures, shift from total to more open community, increasing individualism and outside influences. The result has been

that no coherent religious ideology beyond basic orthodoxy has emerged. One approach to understanding General Conference religious ideology in B.C. is to understand the relationships between its component elements. Following is a listing of the major ways the internal debate is characterized in the interviews.

1. Evangelicalism vs. Traditionalism (G2; G6; G8; G18)
2. Evangelicalism vs. Anabaptism (G4; G5; G9; G10; G24)
3. Anabaptism vs. Traditionalism (G17)
4. 'Christian' vs. Anabaptism (G24)

Traditionalism in this context refers to the replication of the *Kirchliche* tradition as it was practiced in Russia (G18). In this orientation the emphasis is on the committed life expressed in pious living, peace, service, and a commitment and loyalty to Mennonite peoplehood (G20). The development of Christian belief is incorporated into the socialization process which culminates in a three to ten month period of instruction followed by baptism as an adult. Baptism is seen as the confirmation of the committed life and induction into full membership in the church community.

Detractors of the traditional *Kirchliche* position argue that this expression of Christianity is too dated and has little relevance for the current generation. The more evangelical among them fault it for putting too much emphasis on 'the committed life' while neglecting the primacy of personal conversion. The Anabaptist difficulty with Traditionalism is the emphasis given to economic and cultural achievements and the neglect of Anabaptist principles, principal among them being growing class differences and compromises on non-resistance.

Anabaptism in the context of the interviews refers to the attempt to recover the primary emphasis in the sixteenth century tradition. This orientation supports the relationship between belief, ethics and action. Salvation is seen to have personal and communal dimensions with the personal validated in its relationship to the community (G17). It is also seen as both an immediate and a future reality (G17; G20). The ramifications of this orientation described in the interviews included holism that includes all of life (G1; G7), an evangelical emphasis (G7; G9), emphasis on the hermeneutical community (G17), priesthood of all believers (G9), conversion clearly defined (G9; G12), emphasis on non-resistance and peace (G12; G15), the acceptance of social responsibility (G16; G17; G20) and a commitment to community rather than individualism (G17).

Evangelicalism has difficulty mainly with the comprehensiveness of the Anabaptist approach which they see as detracting from the primary concern in Christianity; conversion. The argument is that since conversion precedes 'the committed life' it has primary significance (G5). 'The committed life', while important and expressed mainly in personal piety, is less critical and therefore does not require the same specificity or attention. The Traditional and Evangelical perspectives argue that Anabaptism is no longer realistically accessible (G8; G11). The "Christian" position sees Anabaptism as too rational and communal to be considered relevant in a more individualistic social context (G23).

Evangelicalism also defined as Conservative Protestantism (Burkinshaw, 1988; Bibby, 1987) in this context is broadly seen as the form of the church Mennonites in North America most easily



identify with. The extent of this identification ranges from a recognition that the more open, mobile and individualistic social environment makes a distinct 'decision point' more important for entry into the committed life (G5; G20) to the exclusive emphasis on revivalism with a neglect of the committed life beyond personal piety (G4; B16). It is this latter form that persons with strong traditional or Anabaptist orientations find most troubling. They observe that a movement in this direction erodes the Mennonite understanding of baptism, church membership (G6), *Gelassenheit* (G16) and historical rootedness (G4; G7). Radical Evangelicalism is characterized as being theologically too dogmatic, legalistic and narrow (G10; G24), individualistic (G16) and emotional (G10) to accurately reflect either the Mennonite or Anabaptist traditions.

While there is evidence of this polarization there is also evidence of efforts to bridge the two traditions without losing the Anabaptist-Mennonite holistic orientation (G5; G20). One clear example of this is the adoption of the "Living in Faithful Evangelism" (LIFE) program by the provincial Conference and implemented in a number of the General Conference churches. In contrast to the more individualistic approach of North American Evangelicalism the program is a congregational process which combines theological study, developing skills to become more expressive about faith issues, inviting and including new people and systematic instruction in the meaning of the committed life for the entire congregation (Stoner, 1991). Persons expressed they were more comfortable with this style of church development than either aggressive

proselytizing or being drawn into the 'recycling game' which caters to a consumer type marketing of religion (G15; G20).

The 'Christian' orientation refers to an appeal to the notion of the universal church but defined in various ways. In its broadest form it is a recognition of a larger Christian presence in the world and valuing tolerance and cooperation in the interests of expressing Christian unity and solidarity (G9). A problem with this position, identified in the interviews, occurs when the rationale is used to support a narrow definition of 'Christian.' The term is commonly used to mean 'evangelical Christian' which in B.C. excludes most of Christendom and significantly blurs the boundaries between Alliance, Mennonite Brethren, Baptist, Evangelical Free, Pentecostal and General Conference Mennonites (G6). This position permits a free flow of members between them and means institutions such as Mennonite Educational Institute and Columbia Bible College cannot narrowly define themselves as 'Mennonite' if they wish to remain relevant within this narrow definition of 'Christian'.

The most radical understanding of the term 'Christian' comes out of the religious movements and non-denominational institutions that have influenced religion in B.C. All of these either explicitly or implicitly developed out of anti-church and anti-denominational roots. The movements such as the Charismatic, Jesus and Vineyard Movements emphasize the primary importance of ecstatic religious experiences as opposed to the development of an intellectual faith (G10; G23). Non-denominational institutions such as Campus Crusade are exclusively concerned with evangelism and mission. The local church with its broader agenda and more mundane everyday

demands pales in comparison to the high energy and profile these movements and institutions have been able to generate. As a result they drain away traditional religious loyalties and make it more difficult to maintain denominational distinctives. The General Conference Mennonites have not been immune to the inroads of these religious currents (G4; G6; G10; G23).

An analysis of the economic, political and religious beliefs representing the current world-view of General Conference Mennonites in B.C. indicates general agreement on Christian orthodoxy with considerable divergent positions taken in emphasis and practice. The response to the influence of modernity (urbanization, individualism, secularization, economic determinism), history, B.C.'s social environment and North American religious currents has been far from uniform. This has resulted in a loosening of the direct relationships between economic, political and religious ideologies and an increasing loss of integration of the economic and political domains with religious beliefs. This separation is advanced by the increasing inroads of North American religious currents which place primary emphasis on conversion. The central internal debate among General Conference Mennonites in B.C. is over the definition of 'a whole way of life' in its ideology. The options under discussion involve reaffirming an ideology that embraces all of human reality (economic, political, social, religious) or redefining reality more exclusively in spiritual terms.

## **Leadership and Identification: Redefining Authority**

Since living minority cultures have to deal with change they require the presence of prophetic individuals or processes to reinterpret the group's ideology to accommodate immediate circumstances while retaining a symbolic linkage with the past and containing a clear vision for the future (Driedger, 1990: 174). Historically this function has been performed by an *Aeltester* (Bishop) working within a *Lehrstandt* (council) of ministers and deacons who were appointed for life by the congregation without salary. The *Aeltester* was given authority to perform the rites of communion and baptism and act as final arbiter within a congregation or group of congregations. In keeping with the Anabaptist principle of 'the priesthood of all believers' the *Lehrstandt's* power was limited by congregational mandate. By custom they were obligated to bring all major issues to the membership for final decision and acted as informed council in this process. While subject to the local churches' wishes, particularly the *Aeltester* often developed a charismatic presence and became a symbol of congregational continuity and vision. In Canada *Aeltester* David Toews and *Aeltester* Jacob J. Thiessen were seen as such leaders in the Mennonite constituency because of their persistent and effective efforts during the second and third waves of Mennonite immigration to Canada. This non-hierarchical pattern of leadership was consistent with the Anabaptist communitarian emphasis and continued to be the dominant pattern until the 1960s when a shift to a professional clergy began to take over.

The trend began with the formation of the General Conference Church which recognized that servicing Mennonites along the frontier and involvement in missions could not adequately be accommodated by the traditional pattern. The encroachment of modernity into everyday life was seen to require a better equipped clergy. While there are still a number of retired *Aeltester* and lay ministers in the province the shift to a professional clergy has been complete.

The result of this shift has been a better trained clergy with a broader range of pastoral skills that are better suited to the contemporary needs of congregational members who participate in a more mobile, urban, educated, individualistic and consumer oriented world. It has also accentuated the primacy of congregational power and authority without replacing its symbols and mediating structures. The most dramatic consequence of this change is the nature of the clergy who rather than being chosen from the local membership are usually trained outside religious specialists with the status of contract employees. They receive a specific mandate, usually spelled out in a constitution, and reviewed every three years (G4; G16; G21; G22).

The role of the *Lehrstandt* has fallen away with the abolition of lifetime appointments and been replaced by an elected lay church council under the leadership of an elected congregational chairperson. One recurring observation in the interviews was that this change in organizational structure has overly politicized the decision making processes within congregations. The chairperson has the role of mediating differences without recourse to

traditional authority vested in the traditional *Aeltester* and *Lehrstandt* (G4; G9; G16; G20).

The vacuum in leadership and authority is expressed in the following statements.

- G2 "What the church wants now is a strong leader."
- G4 "How can there be the stability of where we are going as a church if the pastoral leadership at best is simply having to fight to survive as pastors?"
- G15 "There are some questions about who really does lead the church."
- G20 "It may be as one person commented . . . that we demand leadership and yet we defy it."
- G21 "In terms of real positive leadership I think there is a vacuum. In some instances, I was going to say chaos . . . . We have said that for a long time that servant leadership is the best kind of leadership but who then has the authority. . . much of it is a power play."

These quotes illustrate the frustration with the present state of power and authority in General Conference congregations. The rational, professional, legalist and democratic style of leadership that replaced the charismatic lifetime appointed leaders has not provided distinct symbols of authority and continuity to focus the reinterpretation of the culture's ideology into a clear vision for the future. The gap was partially addressed at the 1992 annual conference of the Conference of Mennonites in B.C. when the delegates mandated the Conference minister to take on a stronger role at the congregational level without waiting for a specific congregational invitation as has been the usual practice.

The uneasiness with the present arrangements is also expressed in a discussion of alternate leadership patterns to give a stronger sense of direction. To remedy the situation persons posited a return to a more charismatic style of leadership (G15; G21) and a greater emphasis of lay ministers (G7), as well as new models such

as the executive officer model (G4; G15) and Presbyterian eldership model (G16).<sup>29</sup>

One recurring theme that surfaced in the interviews was the inclusion of more women in leadership to more fully and accurately reflect the priesthood of all believers (G4, G7, G9, G12, G17, G23). To date there have been four women among the professional clergy and representation in lay leadership (congregational chairpersons, deacons, chaplains, educators, musicians). While there is evidence of increasing participation at all levels there is also resistance to this development based on traditional precedent and support for the maintenance of patriarchal model in the Bible (G11, G22).

The main internal debate is between retaining a non-hierarchical or adopting a more hierarchical model of leadership and authority (G15). The rationale for a change is that congregational processes are too insular and slow to accommodate present social realities and what is needed is more focused, effective and responsive organizational structure. The central concern is that the church is drifting into lethargy and needs a new model of leadership and authority which can represent and implement a clear vision for the future.

## **Discussion**

The summary of identification with history, ideology and leadership confirms the observation that General Conference Mennonites in B. C. are not entirely united at the core (S4). The

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<sup>29</sup> The Presbyterian eldership model involves teaching elders (ministers) and lifetime appointed congregational elders forming the legislative body for a specific region. The elders meet in Presbytery and represent the final authority within the church.

assumed necessity of agreement on the significance of the past, a coherent ideology and authoritative and effective symbols of authority are confounded by the data. The interviews indicate the broadest possible spectrum in each dimension characterized by traditional Mennonitism on one end and extreme forms of evangelicalism on the other. While these represent two solitudes they identify the outer limits and not the group as a whole. The group is more involved in finding an appropriate response to modernity and the religious environment in B.C. The more common responses articulated in the interviews include identification with the history, ideology and leadership of either sixteenth century Anabaptism or North American Evangelicalism with some evidence of overlap between the two. The tension in this internal debate revolves around individualism and communalism, holism and particularism, and distinctiveness and assimilation.

Despite this flux there is continuity with a distinctive past in the continued practice of thorough preparation for baptism to ensure new members understand the significance of salvation and the demands of the committed life, a hermeneutical tradition that keeps Biblicism from becoming dogmatism, the choice of the LIFE program for congregational development, strong altruistic activity, resistance to adopting a narrow theological orientation and some measure of *Gelassenheit* which restrains the formation of strident positions and promotes tolerance. The group's resistance to abandoning these distinctive expressions of their cultural tradition while accommodating the influences of the dominant culture and co-religionists illustrates that despite evidence of fragmentation and



weakened symbols of authority General Conference Mennonites on B.C. have retained a distinct identity that has effectively avoided total cultural absorption into mainstream society.

## CHAPTER 7 - IDENTIFICATION WITH SECTARIANISM: IDENTITY IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

"I think there are those in the Conference who have a genuine desire to be Anabaptist, to be wholly Christian. The direction (we are moving in) is to shed our Mennonite history. . . . We will be pushed towards being more homogeneous or Christian than Anabaptist. The community church model will be the next logical step. The dominance of the Mennonite Brethren on the West Coast will shape us. I don't know how much of a backlash there will be because there is obviously a strong contingent of folks who are concerned about keeping some of the heritage, cultural values and theology. How strong it is I don't know." (G7)

Mennonites have been thoroughly analyzed by sociologists (Redekop, 1962, 1973, 1974; Kauffman & Harder, 1975; Hamm, 1978 etc.) using the sect and sect cycle literature developed by Weber (1922; 1958), Troeltsch (1960) and Niebuhr (1929). The body of material that has developed out of this form of analysis is too extensive to review here. Following Wilson (1982), this chapter accepts the evolution of the forms of analysis to accommodate the changing status of religion in western society in which the earlier sharp contrasts between church and sect no longer hold and non-western religions have achieved more currency. As the significance of religion in society is replaced by more secular interests sectarian groups increasingly are characterized by their 'response to the world' rather than by their specific religious protest.

Following Roy Wallis's (1979) distinction between 'world affirming' and 'world rejecting' Wilson suggests using a continuum ranging from 'world denying' to 'world enhancing' as a more appropriate and inclusive analytical tool for the study of sects. The former is characterized by a radical withdrawal from society to save persons *from* the evils of modern life (Children of God, Krishna Consciousness, Amish, Hutterite etc.) and the latter by attempts to

improve members skills to increase their enjoyment of life (Christian Science, Scientology, Transcendental Meditation etc.). In between these extremes he lists forms of 'world indifferent' sects (Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army etc.) which

"tolerate the secular world whilst, as is implicit in the nature of sectarianism, they encourage their votaries to see a better way and a purer life within the world, attempting to be *in* the world whilst not being *of* the world. Their members associate predominantly with each other, whilst drawing short of seeking to establish a separate communal life: in economic activities, in particular, they may find themselves engaged in normal worldly activities, even if, in those activities they bring their own distinctive sectarian values to bear." (Wilson, 1982: 111)

Employing this continuum places fewer restrictions on the empirical evidence than sharply defined typologies which risk the reductionism associated with overgeneralized ideal types. This form of analysis is amenable to the study of groups like the General Conference Mennonites in B.C. who exhibit a high degree of internal diversity. Groups can be defined as existing in either a narrow or broad band on the continuum.

Wilson's shift towards an emphasis on a 'response to the world' recognizes the nature of sects as alternate cultural packages rather than expressions of variety within the accepted boundaries of society. This sectarian tendency to create a distinctive 'whole way of life' as a form of rejection of the status quo is a major source of the misunderstanding and hostility sects experience from the general population (Wilson, 1990: 11). The hostility is similar to that afforded other groups considered to represent 'the other' and an affront to the status quo in society. Chapter three illustrates sectarians (Hutterites, Doukhobors, Mennonites) historically shared pariah status with other minorities (Chinese, Japanese, Indians) in

the province as reflected in similar public attitudes and policies. Distinct minority cultures or sub-cultures are seen to benefit from participation in society without accepting the obligations of full citizenship. The focus of this chapter is to understand the nature of the General Conference Mennonite 'response to the world' in B.C.

### **Modern Society: the Changing Context for Sectarianism**

Since B.C. bears little resemblance to the repressive conditions of sixteenth century Europe that gave rise to Anabaptism a brief description of modern society is needed as a background against which General Conference Mennonite continued identification with sectarianism can be understood. B.C. is a Western liberal democracy which shares in a common notion of equality that has developed into the worship of sameness and a marginalization of difference. In Canada this has translated into the "mythical construction of a multicultural society" in which "unity" is reconciled with "diversity," and "equality" and "harmony" are considered to be achievable, all within a time span of years, decades, if not generations." (Bullivant, 1981: 17) Out of this has grown a discourse that labels 'the other' as alien and therefore insignificant in the ultimate movement of history. This view is underlined by Norris commenting on the absorption of immigrants in B.C. "But in the long run there is really no freedom of choice. The second generation becomes totally assimilated, . . ." (1971: 3) The first characteristic of modern society relevant to its relationship to minority cultures then is a belief in the legitimate supremacy of the dominant culture and its vision for society and the future.

Secondly, in general terms, this vision is shaped by larger movements in history described as 'societalization' by Wilson (1982) and 'modernity' by Berger (1977). Common to each of these is the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (community to institution or society) first described by Tonnies (1887). The shift from a religious to a secular orientation, and local community to large-scale society has corresponded with a fundamental change in the basic organization of society. Societalization described as a 'rational technical social system',

"has been a process in which the interdependences between individuals and groups, and between the various institutional and functional arrangements, have been made more explicit and hence more capable of rational articulation." (Wilson, 1982, 45-46)

Berger (1977) argues in a similar vein that 'modernity' is a product of the Enlightenment marked by abstraction (relativity), futurity (ahistoricism), anomie (normlessness), liberation (individualism) and secularization (areligion). This modern organizational form is enforced by the 'reality policemen' of modern society; teachers, psychiatrists, journalists and other representatives of the dominant culture. Explicit in 'societalization' and 'modernity' is a hegemony of rationality that pervades modern societies regardless of their political orientation and is institutionalized in the official separation of church and state.

Thirdly, B.C. also has some geographic and demographic features that affect sectarian identity in the province. Native born British Columbians represented only 42.8% of the population and less than half of the population reported having maintained a stable residence over five years in the 1981 census (Burkinshaw, 1988: 32-

33). Burkinshaw attributes this transiency to the relative newness of the society and its dependence on resource based industries. He concludes that mobility combined with materialism associated with a frontier mentality (risk taking, get rich quick) results in an abandonment of historical roots and a more rapid and complete secularization of British Columbian society (1988: 34). To this Allan Harder adds the relatively high population density in the Fraser Valley in which extensive interaction between sectarians and the host culture are unavoidable. He concludes that this inevitably results in forms of cultural and ideological homogenization (1972: 6-9).

The population concentration around a coastal port is a product of geography which has a number of ramifications for B.C. society. The separation from the remainder of Canada by three mountain ranges and a common history, coastal terrain and culture with Washington and Oregon has resulted in a North-South communications corridor that is more natural and effective than those running East-West. Harder illustrates this phenomenon by listing a number of California religious movements (Jesus People, Campus Crusade, Charismatics) that found an easy foothold in B.C. but failed to gain a hearing east of the Rockies (1972: 5-6). This cursory description of modern society and B.C. society specifically sets the stage for understanding General Conference identification with sectarianism in the province.

## Transformation or Assimilation

As the foregoing chapters document General Conference Mennonites in B.C. were unable to replicate many of the traditional shelters that had protected their distinctive culture from encroachment in the past. In addition their capacity to resist absorption was weakened by extreme poverty, immigrant and refugee status, and the traumatic memories and affects of demoralizing repression in Russia. The Mennonites' continued identification as sectarians in B.C. involved a dual task; to recombine a variety of fragments of identity from their historical beliefs, and to redefine their relationship to a significantly different host society. An examination of the interviews indicates General Conference Mennonites have retained a sectarian identity but have expanded it to include a broader spectrum of the 'world denying'-'world enhancing' continuum. The following quotes reflect this spread.

- G1 "At present the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil are fighting and we are in this domain and have our obligations . . ."
- G1 "I do think we need to advance in the society. We need to let people know that the church people are concerned about the well-being of the whole person."
- G4 "It seems to me that in the history of the church at least in North America we are entering a pre-Constantinian era in terms of the church being a minority of society and no longer the shaper of values. We are opening ourselves up to a whole line of new heresies that the early church had to face and have to sort our way through that."
- G5 "You want to be salt and light in the world, and want to be part of the world so you can influence the world. . . . if our churches don't change that means our people don't change and the church of the future will become irrelevant to the world."
- G6 "I think the lines between the two kingdoms are drawn differently now or are in constant flux. I think our people by and large still hold to a separation of church and state but I would still say we want a government that sets up a climate for us to thrive economically."
- G7 "The goal was very much to see themselves as an Anabaptist congregation, very deliberately choosing the word Mennonite as part of the name, choosing the word fellowship as conveying some of that theology and right from the start saying we wanted to do something that had to do with the community."
- G16 "There is a tremendous attempt at having a well manicured appearance as one relates to open society. . . There are others among Mennonites who just drop the name 'Mennonite' saying, "Lets forget about it and join the main force."

- G18 "I find that in ways we have become like the society around us and in the process I think we are loosing our critical voice. It interferes more with our way of living than with our neighbors'."
- G20 "I think there is an inherent mistrust of much of our society. There is a filter out there. . . . if there isn't a theological framework that acts as a sieve or a sifter of all that I think we would be in danger of loosing a lot."
- G21 "Religiously as Christians the best thing that can happen to us is getting out of our closed communities if we want to fulfill our mandate in terms of being salt and light of the earth."
- G27 "When we lived in Russia in closed villages we had no communication with the outside world. Then the Lord scattered us, even sent us to Siberia and all over the place. The Soviets did it. We couldn't do it but now there are churches all over there now. Then we came to Canada with the same attitude of being a closed community. We have a wonderful opportunity. Will we do it or not?. . .The whole world is crying for peace and its a great thing if we live up to it."

These representative quotes illustrate the range within which General Conference Mennonites identify themselves as a minority culture. On the 'world enhancing' extreme there is indication of impression management being practiced to the point of denying their roots and a willingness to be absorbed into the mainstream (G16). The rationale is to remove any potential impediments to their enjoyment of future success and respectability in the province. The fruits of the traditional work ethic in an expanding frontier economy are seen as the key they hold to improved social status and the enjoyment of the best the province has to offer. On the other extreme there is evidence of a 'world denying' attitude in the larger Mennonite clusters where language and customs can be somewhat sheltered. This attitude is based on nostalgia about the 'golden era' in Russia and a resentment of the increasing encroachment of society into their lives.

More common than these extremes is the language of 'kingdom of God' (G1), 'minority' (G4) and 'salt and light' (G5; G21) and 'mistrust of society' (G20) as expressions of intentional separation from mainstream culture. At the same time a feeling of insecurity



and vulnerability is contained in the phrases "We are opening ourselves up to a whole line of new heresies" (G4), . . . . if our churches don't change . . . . the church of the future will become irrelevant" (G5), . . . . we are loosing our critical voice" (G18) and ". . . . if there isn't a theological framework that acts as a sieve . . . . we would be in danger of loosing a lot." (G20) In contrast to their historical recourse to withdrawal from society whenever Mennonites felt threatened General Conference Mennonites in B.C. have chosen to participate *in* the world without being *of* the world.

The foregoing chapters indicate the meaning and content of this shift is broadly defined within the group. The internal debate revolves more around emphasis than actual content exacerbated by the influence of co-religionists and homogenizing pressure from society. For purposes of analysis they fall into the broad categories of Traditional, Anabaptist and Evangelical that span the entire middle ground between 'world denying' and 'world enhancing.' At times these categories are mutually exclusive but more often they overlap extensively.

The traditional position holds firm on the necessity of Christian belief as the only authentic response to living in a secular society. They recognize that a 'decision point' is more important in a social context that offers a variety of competing options than in the closed settings where socialization into the faith could be assumed. They support 'deeper life services' which are designed to initiate or affirm belief mainly for insiders. While they support missions and evangelistic efforts they are not aggressive in their approach to proselytizing outsiders. The main emphasis is on

Christian service to reflect the 'kingdom' values of caring, sharing and community as an alternative to an impersonal and alienating secular world (G25).

The Anabaptist position has a similar emphasis on 'being' Christian with a stronger reference to their sixteenth century origins. They have a concern for attracting outsiders to the Christian faith understood as calling persons into a committed life of discipleship. They hold this to be more authentically Anabaptist than defining evangelism exclusively in conversion terms (G4; G7; G24). This is achieved by creating an inviting, caring, nurturing and socially engaged alternate community. The Anabaptist position shares in the Traditional emphasis on service but extends it to being a prophetic voice and social conscience in society much as the Anabaptists had originally been. This means being socially aware and engaged to lend credibility to their critique and action. The alternatives they offer include a communitarian concern for the alienated segments in society (poor, victims, offenders etc.) and proactive expressions of peace theology (mediation services, peace exhibits, counseling services, recycling etc.). The Anabaptist position is seen as an orientation to 'a whole way of life' that relates belief to all human and environmental realities, and avoids fragmenting life into discrete domains.

In the Evangelical position the same elements are redefined and recombined. This group is also interested in service, the 'committed life' and social activism but mainly as it relates to what they identify as the churches' primary purpose: evangelism. At times it is related to sixteenth century Anabaptism's missionizing

efforts but more commonly to the influence of North American Evangelicalism and California religious movements. Since historically the mainline denominations were identified with the status quo in society Mennonites found a more natural shelter with the Evangelical camp and consequently have been more open to movements arising out of it.

In the Evangelical position Christian service is practiced in the traditional form but is increasingly understood and evaluated as a precursor to overt witnessing and not for its own sake. 'The committed life' is understood in the conventional way with a stronger emphasis on personal piety and involvement in direct evangelism. Church worship and life is more narrowly programmed to be 'seeker-friendly' to be attractive and relevant to outsiders (G2). In several churches where this approach has been fully developed conventional worship has been replaced by the use of drama, rock bands, clowns and the lively singing of choruses punctuated by calls to conversion and rededication (G4; G10; G23). A more conservative approach may involve community banquets, public musical and drama productions to which members invite 'unbeliever' friends, neighbors or acquaintances. These serve to introduce and invite outsiders to join the regular program of the church.

## **Discussion**

General Conference identification with sectarianism in British Columbia is the product of both an ascribed status and self-definition. These factors continue to impede their total absorption into mainstream society. Despite evidence of considerable

behavioral assimilation General Conference Mennonites continue to represent an alternate cultural response to 'modernity' that is an affront to the prevailing ideology of cultural homogenization. At the same time they are unable to maintain their traditional 'world denying' position and have developed a new relationship to the host society. In this process they have accommodated themselves to a new social and geographic environment. They did so under the influence of North American Evangelicalism which had initially afforded them shelter in the B.C. religious community. This influence continues to shape them through the domination of their closest co-religionists, the Mennonite Brethren, who have decidedly embraced Evangelicalism. However, General Conference Mennonites also retained some historical countervailing elements as seen in the Traditional and Anabaptist orientations described in this chapter. As a result the 'world indifferent' sectarian position they have taken is not uniform. While the distinctions between these differing positions can be viewed as a matter of semantics involving the redefinition and recombining of identical elements a strident application of the Evangelical approach represents a distinct departure from the tradition. Confining the theological content too narrowly to 'conversion theology' risks reducing its relevance to 'a whole way of life.' This position tends to marginalize the tradition's more inclusive theology and historical trademarks of service, community, non-resistance, mutual aid, discipleship and *Gelassenheit*. The outcome of the internal debate is open to speculation. What can be said with certainty based on the evidence is that the narrowly defined 'world denying' position has been

transformed into a 'world indifferent' stance which struggles with the question of being *in* the world but not *of* the world. The shift has successfully blocked their cultural absorption into the host society and retained their sectarian identity.

## CHAPTER 8 - SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

"Again in retrospect, looking at that very thin line of whatever Mennonites were before the revolution and Stalin's purges, he hammered the texture out of it, and basically all they had were some very simple things left. . . In a sense what I view is people trying to be good people. In many respects trying to be human in ridiculous situations - horrific situations. They brought that essence to Canada and we had a chance to build on that again individually and corporately, to flesh it out, to make it bigger, to rediscover what it was that had been taken away from them."  
(G17)

This quote, from a second generation General Conference Mennonite, represents a common theme in the life-histories and interviews examined in the thesis. In it he describes the struggle for self-definition as the rediscovery and expansion of the 'essence' of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, not to merely replicate it in British Columbia but to 'build on that again' and 'flesh it out.' Implicit in the quote is a rejection of a static view of culture and an understanding of the active and reflexive nature of cultural production, reproduction and innovation. It also speaks of exercising choice and intention to provide generational continuity for a distinct Mennonite identity.

The concluding chapter summarizes the diverse approaches General Conference Mennonites in B.C. have taken to achieve this task by applying the theoretical orientation and generative model developed in chapter two to the historical material in chapters three and four and the contemporary factors of minority identification in chapters five, six and seven. This provides the background for testing the relationship between form and process, and forms of analysis that arise out of them. Finally, the relationship between form and process is tested to provide a more complete explanation of the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures.

## Summary

The Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition represents a distinct group of people and a unique 'whole way of life' that has persisted for four hundred and sixty-seven years. Chapter two documents how during the sixteenth century geographically scattered communitarian alternatives to the repressive nature of feudal social arrangements in Europe developed into a growing protest movement. It was quickly isolated and labeled as a single counter-culture by the hegemonic authority of the church and state. General Conference Mennonite identity as a minority culture in B.C. is derived out of the Dutch-Prussian-Russian tradition that came from these beginnings.

The classical static view of culture as typified by internal homogeneity, isolation and relative autonomy has limited utility for understanding Mennonite culture. Since their plural beginnings they have been marked by movements of convergence and divergence as autonomous local groups formed alliances or fractured. One movement of convergence involving General Conference Mennonites emerged out of an agreement on the essentials of Christian orthodoxy and key Anabaptist distinctives (adult baptism, non-resistance, *Gelassenheit*, congregational autonomy etc.) and tolerance in matters considered non-essential (dress, language, education etc.). While this allows for fraternal relations and joint programs at provincial, national and international levels of Conference it has not resulted in centralizing legislative structures or internal homogeneity. This is illustrated by the internal debates and coexistence of a wide variety of positions taken on all of the

minority identification factors documented in chapters five to seven.

Mennonite culture has no claim to a homeland and has only been marginally successful in finding shelter in geographic isolation. Their history of negotiating for land and conditions in which they could live without interference has usually been short-lived. Progressive encroachment of host societies and Mennonite resistance to cultural incorporation resulted in their migration from Prussia to Russia, and three major movements from Russia to Canada. Canada was amenable to their aspirations at first but also assumed their inevitable assimilation into the mainstream culture. To speed this process the negotiated 'privileges' were progressively withdrawn.

In B.C. public attitudes and policy blocked the development of closed total communities. Without geographic isolation, the maintenance of a critical mass to support institutions vital for the continuity of a distinct minority culture became more pressing. This shift left the culture exposed to direct competition and displacement by institutions in society and those of other minority groups.

Mennonites have achieved a measure of autonomy from mainstream culture in the areas of religion and occupational choice. Historically, Mennonites were quick to assert their autonomy by developing independent religious, educational and mutual aid institutions. While the level of autonomy afforded during the 'commonwealth' era or by rural agriculture could not be replicated in B.C. there is evidence of a movement into the professions and



management sectors to maximize personal autonomy and avoid being drawn directly into the class struggle in society. One additional factor affecting Mennonite separation from the dominant culture is the close relationship between the major churches and the ruling elite. This caused Mennonites to gravitate towards co-religionists who also resisted total incorporation into mainstream culture.

Even though the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition has been identified as a distinct minority culture by ascription and self-definition its 'informing spirit', in the classical sense, has not developed a uniform body of cultural inventory (territory, language, art etc.) to support a 'whole way of life.' This would have been too rigid and brittle to accommodate the transformational changes in form documented in chapter three. Their essence needed to be transportable and adaptable to respond to the variety of conditions they encountered in their negotiations with host cultures.

The evidence indicates that Anabaptist-Mennonite culture is more accurately characterized as a 'constituting spirit' or 'signifying system' (Williams, 1981). This active definition of culture goes beyond an emphasis on the replication of form to a process of cultural production, reproduction and innovation mediated by reflexivity. The sixteenth century Anabaptists distilled their initial response to the crisis in feudalism out of the 'community of goods' documented in Acts 2 and 4 in the New Testament and the notion of *Gelassenheit* in thirteenth century monasticism. They recombined these historical elements into a redefinition of 'the committed life' which had social (non-resistance, peace), religious (adult baptism), political (separation of church and state) and

economic (community of goods, mutual aid) ramifications for the present crisis and a vision for the future of society. There was an effort to develop and maintain the integrity of an integrated cultural whole. While their solution to the crisis was rejected, the cultural package continues to provide a 'signifying system' within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

Chapters five, six and seven document that General Conference Mennonites continue to be influenced by the Anabaptist 'constituting spirit.' However, the extent to which it guides cultural production and reproduction and innovation varies from a determined recovery of its holistic nature to active denial of its contemporary relevance. The evidence of its persistence can be seen in significant support for mutual aid programs, high professional and volunteer involvement in social programs, adult baptism, church as a hermeneutical community, emphasis on peace and mediation, non-hierarchical organizational structures and congregational autonomy.

Two clear examples of how the Anabaptist 'constituting spirit' continues to affect internal processes have to do with leadership and church development styles. The shift to a professional clergy has not resulted in diminishing lay involvement in the church. In fact, the traditional *Lehrstand* that was traditionally dominated by the clergy has been replaced by a lay church council with most decisions made at the congregational level. Rather than forming a professional controlling elite, the professional clergy are seen more as contract employees with defined roles as preachers, shepherds, teachers, chaplains, counselors and administrators. In this way the original emphasis on the 'priesthood of all believers' has actually

been reinforced rather than diminished by the shift to religious specialists.

Contrary to the aggressive individualistic church growth models adopted by their closest co-religionists, General Conference Mennonites in B.C. have chosen a development model (LIFE) that maximizes congregational participation and training for 'the committed life.' These two examples are evidence of the continuity with the distinctive 'constituting spirit' or 'signifying system' of traditional Anabaptism without recourse to replicating historical forms.

Rosaldo's (1989) conclusion that cultures do not exist as autonomous units but should be viewed as 'between cultures' cannot be limited to modern cultures. The review of the historical transformations of Mennonite identity in chapter three indicates their status as a 'between culture' from their origins in the sixteenth century. The nature of mutual cultural boundaries, where difference, struggle and change are significant features, proved the domain of everyday reality in which the 'signifying system' was tested, adapted and applied.

It is here where Barth's (1969) conclusion that these boundaries are characterized by transactional processes which allow movement across these boundaries and the interchange of personnel becomes important. What modern plural societies demand of minority identities is a kind of schizophrenic existence. Minority cultures must understand and function within the 'signifying systems' of several cultures and juggle their relative significance in everyday behavior.

Chapters five, six and seven indicate that for General Conference Mennonites in B.C. the maintenance of cultural boundaries is complicated by issues of geography, demography and ideology. To the historical necessity of defining their identity in relation to a single host culture they now have to contend with a variety of conflicting and/or competing 'signifying systems' whose encroachment they cannot avoid due to rapid urbanization, a north-south communications corridor, and social and economic integration.

The internal debates over the significance of history and Anabaptism, and the divergent definitions of Anabaptist, Christian and 'the committed life' illustrate that the struggle for self-definition occurs not only externally in relation to the dominant society but internally as their distinctive 'signifying system' is also challenged through the influence of co-religionists and currents in North American religion. At the same time the mediating institutions for interpreting the past have been weakened by a loss of the traditional symbols of authority and a more politicized form of congregationalism. The effect of this is seen in the lack of a coherent approach to change, and the emergence of irreconcilable solitudes at the fringes (traditionalism and radical evangelicalism).

The current debate in Sociology and Anthropology makes a distinction between knowledge and truth that has relevance for understanding the struggle for self-definition in minority cultures. Knowledge is seen as the product of social processes and therefore is expressed in many forms, is seldom neutral, objectifies the subjective, is socially engaged and represents specific interests. The confusion that arises is that knowledge is always someone's

'truth' claim which competes with other 'truth' claims in the social context.

This competing and malleable nature of knowledge is seen in the internal and external transactions General Conference Mennonites in B.C. participate in. Since the establishment of a utopian theocratic state was out of the question, Mennonites have reoriented their communitarian vision within modernity and a liberal democratic society. In the process they shifted from closed to open communities, from rural to urban residence patterns, from a distinctive to an invisible cultural inventory and from agriculture to the professions. As documented in chapters six and seven, this has resulted in corresponding shifts in ideological orientation and sectarian identification. Despite this they continue to be seen as a distinct minority culture by ascription and self-definition.

Co-religionists and religious movements particular to the Pacific communications corridor have had a major influence on the reorientation of General Conference Mennonite identity in B.C. This influence has prompted a redefinition of Anabaptism in more exclusively religious terms and a corresponding resistance to this revisionism.

The revisionism misrepresents the nature of sixteenth century society. The language and imagery of Europe had a distinct Christian character. The secular and sacred had merged in the feudal system of land tenure which involved the church as a major landlord. The Anabaptist protest was not confined to religious matters as was the reform of Luther and Zwingli, but to the total social arrangements in

society. Anabaptist reformers refused to isolate religion from the totality of social reality.

The process of social construction of General Conference Mennonite identity is clearly demonstrated in the internal debates to interpret their history and formulate a vision for the future. These include the efficacy of identification with historical symbols, symbols of authority and traditional ideologies, and responding to the influences of modernity and new religious currents which compete for their attention. The most complex among these is the ideological debate between Traditionalism, Anabaptism, Evangelicalism and 'Christian.' This has resulted in a variety of responses to the 'world' ranging across the entire continuum from 'world denying' to 'world enhancing.' The situation is exacerbated by a lack of effective forums, mediating individuals or processes.

On the surface this situation appears to be a recipe for instability and fragmentation but as the historical review suggests this dynamic has animated the tradition from its origins. What keeps this seeming malaise from resulting in total disintegration is a belief in the local church as a hermeneutical community with the final authority over the interpretation of Christian orthodoxy, Anabaptist distinctives, and, in B.C., the General Conference principle of tolerance. The internal tension gives the culture a mechanism for responding to change without the loss of identity or potential for joint action.

The risk of fracturing exists mainly when irreconcilable solitudes develop, as was the case in the seventies with the Charismatic movement and presently with the extreme expressions

of Evangelicalism. Common to both of these is a narrow redefinition of 'the committed life' (emotional spirituality) and 'whole way of life' (exclusively religious) that represent a departure from the more holistic Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of reality. As a result these movements have not found a lasting foothold in General Conference Mennonite churches in B.C.

The data chapters provide ample documentation of the transactional nature of the struggle for self-definition within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition from its origins through to its contemporary expression in the General Conference Mennonites in B.C. The transactions have internal and external dimensions. Initially the transactions involved negotiating recognition by similar but scattered social reformers with the ruling European elite. The outcome of these transactions labeled them as a single group and criminalized their identity. This resulted in severe persecution and exile.

In Prussia the remnant redefined themselves as quietist alternate rural communities and found tolerance for a time. However, the tolerance for their distinctive identity came to an end and coercive measures were applied to force their assimilation into mainstream society. As a result Mennonite resistance to cultural incorporation predisposed them to migrate to Russia where Tzarina Catherine II and conditions were more accepting of their aspirations. Here they identified themselves as a theocratic 'commonwealth' in which they controlled the civil as well as the religious authority. This identity failed to materialize because of

the difficulty of balancing religious and civil interests internally and growing encroachment from the host society.

Organizationally the civil authority was better equipped and more decisive than the religious authority. While technically they were separate, the leadership in both came from the same population and increasingly represented an emerging upper class. This contradiction between maintaining a communitarian ideology and emerging class distinctions was mediated by continuous efforts to acquire additional land to accommodate the landless population. Despite these initiatives a concentration and imbalance in the distribution of power and authority could not be avoided, thwarting the realization of a theocratic 'commonwealth.'

During this period Mennonites came under the influence of German Baptists, Lutherans, Pietists and Moravians. As a result a widespread movement to reform religious life arose. When changes did not come fast enough or lacked decisiveness, a segment, the Mennonite Brethren, broke with the *Kirchliche* tradition in 1860.

Mennonite isolation from mainstream Russian society resulted in the imposition of programs of Russification designed to restrict the exercise of distinctive identities and coerce minorities to assimilate. Mennonites were able to negotiate an accommodation with the state for a time, but in the end suffered severe repression after the introduction of communism.

In the Canadian context, the initial migrants of 1874-1880 entered into a formal agreement with Canada which respected their distinct culture and provided conditions under which it could continue unhindered. Underlying this agreement was the assumption



that Mennonites would soon blend into the Anglo-Canadian majority. This hidden agenda surfaced during WWI when resentment grew over Mennonite exemption from military service, and in 1918 when the public schools were imposed on Mennonite villages. Mennonites were labeled undesirables, and their immigration into the country was blocked between 1918 and 1923. Subsequent Mennonite migrations in 1923-1930 and 1947-1950 received no assurances from the host society but had the freedom to pursue their distinctive cultural identity in the face of assumed cultural incorporation.

The major factor in reasserting a *Kirchliche* identity in Canada identified in chapter four was their relationship to the General Conference Mennonite Church that had preceded them. This Conference assisted in Russian Mennonite migration efforts and dispersed *Reiseprediger* to find and organize Mennonites scattered on the Canadian frontier. Their success is seen in their influence and participation in organizing local churches and providing a model for the formation of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Conference of Mennonites in British Columbia. These institutions were essential to the continuity of Mennonite identity in Canada. The transactions involved allowed for the traditional emphasis on congregational autonomy but broadened and strengthened *Kirchliche* identity through provincial, national and international associations.

The internal and external transactional processes affecting General Conference Mennonite identity in B.C can be grouped into three interrelated categories; transactions with the dominant culture, transactions with co-religionists and transactions internal to the group. The relationship with the dominant culture is

characterized as reactive because of society's assumption of putative homogeneity which marginalizes expressions of cultural difference from the official discourse. As a result General Conference Mennonites must fend for the maintenance of their distinct identity without its explicit support. At the same time they are not officially restricted in their efforts to do so.

At first Mennonites found the B.C. social environment hostile to distinct minority cultures. Together with other religious and racial minorities they were quickly identified as undesirables and restricted from full participation in B.C. society. Mennonites were able to avoid the full impact of this official policy by circumventing the restrictions on crown land by dealing with private land speculators, and concentrating in unregulated sectors of the economy. When agriculture proved limited for their purposes they gravitated to other unregulated occupations.

When open hostility resurfaced during WWII because of their refusal to participate in the war effort Mennonites mediated their traditional radical pacifism. For the most part they attempted to reassure B.C. society of their loyalty as responsible citizens by purchasing bonds to support the Red Cross and providing relief programs for the elderly and children affected by the bombing of London. When the war ended B.C. Mennonites provided relief supplies and sponsored resettlement programs for refugees through the inter-Mennonite agency of Mennonite Central Committee.

The last official policy affecting Mennonites was lifted in 1948 when their franchise was reinstated. However, Mennonites remain suspicious of party politics so that few seek public office

beyond the local community. The same kind of preference for maintaining some level of autonomy is seen in their occupational choices and the shielding of their distinctiveness by adopting a cultural inventory that is indistinguishable from that of the host society. Mennonites have also avoided total cultural incorporation by aligning themselves with other co-religionist minorities rather than traditionally powerful mainline churches. Society has accommodated upward economic mobility but restricted their incorporation into the controlling economic and political elite.

Their distinct response to the 'world' documented in chapter seven can be characterized as a struggle with being *in* the world but not *of* the world. This assumes applying a 'signifying system' to modernity and social reality that is different from that of the dominant culture (Christian orthodoxy and Anabaptist distinctiveness). It also explains, in large measure, Mennonite resistance to cultural incorporation.

General Conference Mennonites in B.C. are aware that they represent a minute part of Christendom and so see expressing solidarity with the larger Christian community as important. The difficulty with doing this is complicated by the fact that B.C. is characterized by diverse expressions of Christianity some of which are hostile to each other. Some churches, anti-church and anti-denominational religious movements in the province are highly independent and exclusive. General Conference Mennonites traditionally have been suspicious of state churches and so were more naturally drawn into dialogue with smaller groups under the umbrella of North American Evangelicalism.

The development of a distinct General Conference Mennonite identity in B.C. is partly a product of a fracturing that occurred when the Mennonite Brethren deemed the *Kirchliche* mode of baptism invalid. In response the *Kirchliche* organized separately and associated with the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

Even though initially their transactions with the Mennonite Brethren were strained there has been extensive interaction and cooperation. The relationship was unavoidable since they shared a common history and settled in close proximity to each other; moreover the Mennonite Brethren dominate the Mennonite community in B.C. Through the Mennonite Brethren who have more uncritically moved towards total incorporation into North American Evangelicalism, General Conference Mennonite identification has been influenced by this expression of Christianity. While they are seen to be following the lead of the Mennonite Brethren, they have taken a more cautious and critical approach to preserve their distinct identity. This caution is evident in the rejection of narrow expressions of Evangelicalism and a reluctance to abandon the holistic emphasis in traditional Anabaptism altogether. One of the consequences of this measured approach has been a significant drift of individual members, who find the tradition too insular, to churches (Mennonite Brethren, Alliance, Evangelical Free, Baptist) and movements (Jesus Movement, Charismatic Movement, Campus Crusade, Vineyard Movement) that embrace Evangelicalism uncritically.

**Table 10-Identification Factors Affecting the Transactional Processes**

ID. FACTORS	16th C.	Prussia	Russia	Canada	B.C.
Territory	-scattered	-rural enclaves	-exclusive lands	-compact communities	-critical mass
Institutional	-none	-church community	-institutional completeness	-partial replication	-mainly church related
Cultural	-plural	-closed community	-cultural expansion	-cultural borrowing	-partial integration
Historical	-N.T. church -monasticism -feudalism -persecution	-tolerance -restriction	-welcomed -tolerance -restriction -repression	-welcomed -restriction -tolerance	-hostility -restriction -tolerance
Ideological	-communitarian reformers	-alternate communities	-theocratic commonwealth	-in search of utopia	-acommodating new influences
Authority	-reformers	-quietist agriculturalists	-secular/church interests	-reconstituting-peoplehood	profess-ional clergy
Sectarianism	-conformity -world denying	-conformity -world denying	-Russification -world denying	-Anglo-conformity -world denying -world indifferent	-Anglo-conformity -world indifferent -world enhancing
<b>OTHER</b>					
Choice	-reformers	-rural isolation	-theocracy	-autonom	-accommodation
Intentionality	-communitarian society	-alternate community	-closed total community	-separate communities	-distinct identity
Class peasants	-church/state/peasantry	-aristocracy/peasants	-monarchy/ -proletariat/ bourgeoisie	-capitalism	-capitalism
Power	-church/state hegemony	-church/state vs minority	-monarchy/minorities	-nation state/minorities	-nation state/minorities
Race	-n/a	-n/a	-n/a	-n/a	-similar status

The internal transactions involved in the struggle for self-definition among General Conference Mennonites center mainly on debates generated by the influence of modernity, B.C. society and Mennonite religious associations. An examination of the six minority identification factors and sectarianism indicates active negotiation over institutional, cultural, historical, ideological and sectarian identification. Identification with territory resolved

itself when closed communities proved untenable. Even though the shift in leadership has the advantage of providing a more adequate clergy and heightened lay control in the church it has resulted in a more politicized organizational structure. It also did not adequately replace the mediating functions of the traditional unpaid clergy and their symbolic representation of congregational continuity.

**TABLE 11- Summary of the Outcomes of the Transactional Processes**

OUTCOME	16th C.	Prussia	Russia	Canada	B.C.
Conflict	-execution -exile	-nonresistance -land tenure -citizenship	-Russification -military service service -class	-military service -private schools	-military service -citizenship -land tenure
Segregation					
-voluntary		-rural isolation	-closed communities	-compact communities	-critical mass
-involuntary	-criminalization	-segregation	-Siberian exile		
Resistance					
-Active	-pamphlets -disputations				
-Passive	-nonconformity	-nonconformity	-nonconformity	-nonconformity	-nonconformity -impression management
Redefinition	-religious -social -political -economic	-religious -economic	-religious -economic	-religious -economic -political	-religious -economic -social -political
Reinvention	-social reformers	-quietist farmers	-total communities	-separate communities	-integrated minority
Accommodation	-n/a	-n/a	-n/a	-urbanization -occupational -education -cultural inventory	-urbanization -occupational -education -cultural inventory
Assimilation					
-Behavioural					-middle class -invisible culture
-Structural			-inter-Mennonite		-inter-Mennonite -co-religionists

## **Conclusions**

If the classical definition of culture as an 'informing spirit', with the traditional hallmarks of homogeneity (stasis, order), isolation and relative autonomy, is applied to historical and contemporary Mennonite culture traditional assimilationist theories can be substantiated. There is little consistency in cultural inventory, only symbolic isolation and minimal cultural autonomy. The historical transformations, evidence of behavioral assimilation and internal and external conflict involving modernity, B.C. society and co-religionists can be taken as signs of anomie, instability and lack of consensus within the culture. These then may be seen as representing the preconditions of eventual cultural collapse and total incorporation into mainstream society which is taken as the legitimate authority in a liberal democracy.

The main difficulty with taking this approach to Mennonite culture is that it doesn't adequately deal with the empirical evidence. Rather than analyzing the culture as 'it is being lived' it is contrasted against an ideal intellectual construct. In the process, change, struggle and difference are subsumed by a preoccupation with necessity of cultural replication and order. These factors are then prejudged as transitional and marginalized or dismissed as ultimately insignificant within the official discourse. This approach makes essentialist homogenization assumptions about the nature of cultural change that are better suited to a hypothetical single universal culture but limited in their ability to explain the reality of cultural pluralism.

Following Clifford (1986; 1988), Rosaldo (1989), Williams (1960, 1981) and Harries-Jones (1985) the thesis holds that classical approaches to culture begin at the wrong end of the equation. Rather than fitting the evidence into a predetermined frame of reference, living cultures are seen as representing distinct 'constituting spirits' and 'signifying systems' independently responding to changes in the social environment. The evidence indicates that because of its minority status the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition has been involved in a constant struggle to redefine itself in the face of the assimilationist assumptions of the dominant culture. The movement historically is characterized by a high degree of internal debate, fracturing and convergence as well as extensive negotiation with host cultures in an effort to assert their distinct identity. In the process Mennonite culture has undergone major transformations over time. The current struggle for self-definition among General Conference Mennonites in B.C. needs to be understood against this background.

As the historical material indicates, transformations are determined by the culture's ability to reflect upon itself and exercise its choice and intentionality based on a distinct 'signifying system.' Following Berger and Luckmann (1969) the thesis holds that not only cultural inventory and characteristics change within the dialectical process of the social construction of reality but the 'signifying system' itself is subject to the same process. This is particularly true in modern society in which a plurality of systems coexist, influence and compete with each other.



It would follow that a pluralistic social context represents either evidence of cultural homogenization at a higher level of abstraction or the potential for extending the number of 'signifying systems' as the system's elements are recombined in a variety of new ways. The former is supported by the increase in common cultural inventory and the latter by the proliferation of new religious and social movements in modern society. What is important to the thesis is the evidence that despite transformational changes, shared cultural inventory and the influence of cultural plurality, Anabaptist-Mennonite culture has persisted through time and continues to represent a distinctive 'constituting spirit' and 'signifying system.'

The ideals of stasis, order and homogenization represent cultural inertia in its most complete form. The logical extension of classical universalizing and homogenizing forms of analysis assume them to be the inevitable outcome of human history (e.g.. Marxism). This approach imposes an ideal cultural form into the analysis for which there is only fragmentary evidence in the social context. In the process, change, struggle and difference which are its dynamic and dominant features are inadequately understood or explained.

A modification to the classical approach is William's explanation of a culture as a "slow reach again for control" (1960: 295). This puts stasis, order and homogenization in perspective with the reality of social change, struggle and difference but still imposes a conclusion on their relationship and relative significance. The nature of reality as the product of social construction limits the helpfulness of such assumptions because of the plurality of often

competing social realities and the elements of history, choice, intentionality and power. All of these mediate the assumed inevitability of arriving at linear conclusions.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite example illustrates that, while there is evidence of historical continuity and recurring patterns in the internal and external transactional processes, no conclusive statements can be made about the outcomes. Despite active and passive coercion from dominating societies in Europe, Prussia, Russia and Canada for their cultural incorporation, Mennonites have successfully circumvented this possibility for four hundred and sixty-eight years through successive transformations of their identity and cultural inventory. This supports the conclusion that General Conference Mennonites in B.C. represent one expression of a living minority cultural tradition actively engaged in processes of cultural production, reproduction and innovation. These are essential to the continuous reinvention of their distinctive identity in the face of a rapidly changing modern world. In this process they exercise their prerogative to independently interpret social reality and respond to it with a 'signifying system' that is of their own choosing.

The final analytical task is to examine the relationship between form and process for understanding minority cultures. The contention in the theoretical orientation in chapter two was that the emphasis on changes in cultural form in classical analysis provides a partial explanation of social reality. Following Barth (1969) the thesis argues that the processes that give rise to changes in form are also significant elements of the explanation. The difficulty with

an exclusive emphasis on form is its static quality and lock-step approach to understanding changes in form. Focusing only on process risks a slide into relativism. Combining the two involves holding the dichotomous elements in tension with each other and appreciating the role each has in providing a more complete explanation.

The transactional processes documented in chapters three to seven did not occur in a vacuum. Sixteenth Century Anabaptists were responding to a specific form of society (feudalism) as do contemporary General Conference Mennonites in B.C. (modernity). In the same vein the products of social negotiation (responses, outcomes) are described in terms of specific forms (communalism, segregation etc.). Form and process, then, are distinct constituent elements essential for accurately defining culture as 'a whole way of life' and 'as it is being lived.'

Understanding the constitutive potential of culture and the nature of social construction suggests that cultural forms, while providing the building blocks of culture, must be seen as successive starting points rather than definitive characteristics of a given culture. The transactional processes within culture draw on elements within this resource to combine with selected new potential and apply it to present and future behavior. In the dialectical process traditional forms are redefined and the vision of the future reinvented out of traditional and new elements. The success of this process is dependent on the culture's ability to reinterpret its tradition in ways that meaningfully correspond with

its members' own experiences and present a coherent vision for the future.

This process is confirmed by the historical and contemporary experience in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition examined in the thesis. One clear example is the present struggle within the General Conference Mennonites in B.C. The group can be defined as a distinct minority culture with elements of traditional forms (congregationalism, mutual aid, hermeneutical community, orthodox Christianity etc.) combined with contemporary elements (professional clergy, middle class lifestyle, educated etc.). At the same time the review of internal and external transactional processes highlights the continuing negotiation over the relevance of traditional history, ideology, leadership and the influence of co-religionists, B.C. society and modernity. This illustrates the tentative nature of cultural forms and the complex processes of social construction that redefine and potentially recreate it in a struggle for meaningful cultural continuity.

However, the process is more dialectical than linear since traditional forms seldom exist in isolation. They exist in a social matrix of alternate, competing cultural forms charged with power relationships of coercion and dominance. In this situation culture depends on mechanisms of reinvention to mediate group choices and define its intentionality to avoid excessive fragmentation of the cultural whole and maintenance of group solidarity. Central to this process is the relationship between the dichotomous elements of stasis and change, order and struggle, and homogenization and difference which exist in all cultures but are amplified and more

visible in groups outside the mainstream because of their minority status.

From the preceding discussion it follows that culture is partly explained by an analysis of its form and subsequent changes in form. It is more fully understood with the additional explanation and analysis of the processes that animate it. Finally, an even more complete understanding and level of analysis is reached with an explanation of the relative significance of form and process within living cultures and the relationship between them.

### **Implications**

The implication of the analysis and conclusions developed in this chapter involve setting aside the exclusiveness of traditional forms of analysis in anthropology and sociology and creating room for other complementary approaches to understanding society and culture. Firstly, rather than limiting the analysis to the observable static forms and behaviors it draws attention to the active nature of the social context in which reality is constantly reconstructed to articulate with everyday experience, accommodate new potential and mediate relationships of power. Human experience, choice and intentionality result in an exponential variety of ways in which reality can be defined.

Secondly, forms of analysis are considered tools for understanding society and culture. They are, therefore, blunt instruments whose adequacy is ultimately tested in light of emerging consensus in the empirical evidence. The imposition of a specific form of analysis prejudices and distorts the evidence while

analysis arising out of the evidence validates the distinctive reality of cultures as they are actually experienced.

Thirdly, the conclusions imply that making essentialist assumptions about the ultimate viability of minority cultures goes beyond the scope of scientific inquiry and risks representing an ideological position. Particularly vulnerable are classical forms of analysis which make universalizing and homogenizing assumptions. These assumptions are tempting hidden agendas for liberal democracies who in the name of the ideal of equality marginalize the significance of cultural difference.

Fourthly, the model implies that the struggle for self-definition involves multiple factors and therefore cannot be reduced to single factors. While race, religion, nationality, gender or class may influence the transactional process they usually are part of a cluster of interrelated factors. General Conference Mennonites' distinct cultural identity is in reality a mixture of religion, work ethic, sectarianism, history and cultural inventory. The generative model is transferable to the struggle for self-definition in other minority cultures which may incorporate an entirely different set of factors into the transactional process and arrive at a different set of outcomes depending on choice, intentionality and reflexivity affecting the process.

Finally, the conclusions imply that any form of analysis needs to take a cautious approach to making 'truth claims.' Cultural forms and behaviors are the products of internal and external social transactions and therefore not immutable. This can be said of all cultures but is particularly relevant for minorities who define

themselves against the background of a dominant culture. The struggle for self-definition in minority cultures results in definable transformations of form which defy the assumption of putative homogeneity in modern society.

## Appendix A: A LIST OF THE GENERAL INTERVIEWS

	Sex	Age	Migration	Generation	Status
G 1	M	40+	Refugee 2 (1960-)	First	Clergy
G 2	F	20+	Transmigration (Paraguay)	First	Layperson
G 3	M	40+	Transmigration (Paraguay)	First	Layperson
G 4	M	40+	Other	N/A	Layperson
G 5	M	20+	Immigrant (Hong Kong)	First	Clergy
G 6	M	40+	Kanadier	Third	Clergy
G 7	M	20+	Refugee 1 (1947-1952)	Second	Clergy
G 8	F	40+	Russlaender	Second	Layperson
G 9	M	40+	Russlaender	Second	Layperson
G 10	F	20+	Kanadier	Fourth	Layperson
G 11	M	60+	Russlaender	Second	Layperson
G 12	F	20+	Russlaender	Second	Layperson
G 13	M	40+	Refugee 1	First	Clergy
G 14	M	40+	Refugee 2	First	Layperson
G 15	M	20+	Kanadier	Third	Layperson
G 16	M	40+	Kanadier	Third	Layperson
G 17	M	20+	Refugee 1	Second	Layperson
G 18	M	40+	Refugee 1	First	Clergy
G 19	M	40+	Immigrant (China)	First	Clergy
G 20	M	40+	Other (American)	N/A	Clergy
G 21	M	65+	Kanadier	Third	Clergy
G 22	M	40+	Kanadier	Third	Clergy
G 23	F	20+	Kanadier	Fourth	Layperson
G 24	F	20+	Russlaender	Third	Layperson
G 25	F	65+	Refugee 1	First	Layperson
G 26	F	40+	Russlaender	Second	Layperson
G 27	M	65+	Russlaender	First	Clergy

## Appendix B: A LIST OF THE SPECIFIC INTERVIEWS

	Sex	Age	Status
S 1	M	40+	Mennonite Brethren Layperson
S 2	M	40+	Mennonite Brethren Clergy
S 3	M	65+	General Conference Clergy
S 4	M	65+	General Conference Theologian
S 5	M	40+	General Conference Clergy
S 6	M	65+	General Conference Historian
S 7	M	65+	General Conference Clergy



## Appendix C: A SUMMARY OF THE LIFE HISTORIES

LIFE HISTORIES		Sex	Age	Migration	Generation	Status
L 1	Pub.	M	65+	1923-1929	First	Layperson
L 2	Unpub./Oral	M	65+	1923-1929	First	Clergy
L 3	Unpub./Oral	F	65+	1947-1952	First	Layperson
L 4	Oral	M	65+	1874-1885	Second	Layperson
L 5	Unpub./Oral	F	40+	1923-1929	Second	Layperson
L 6	Oral	M	40+	1960-	First	Clergy
L 7	Oral	F	20+	1923-1930	Third	Layperson
L 8	Oral	F	20+	1874-1885	Fourth	Layperson

### Summary

A brief description of Mennonite culture is needed to understand the context in which the life histories are set. Russian Mennonite culture during L1, L2 and L4's early years can be characterized as an independent commonwealth built on the pillars of the church and agriculture. The Mennonites, with agreement from the Russian government, lived in semi-autonomous regions in the Southern Ukraine and until the advent of the Russian revolution developed with minimal interference from the host culture. Cultural expectations revolved around the maintenance of Anabaptist piety and successful agricultural production. Membership in one of the local autonomous Mennonite churches was assumed as was adherence to Christian orthodoxy as it was understood within the Anabaptist tradition. *Gelassenheit*, non-swearing of oaths, non-resistance, and 'community of goods' understood as mutual aid were upheld by the Mennonite church and civil authorities and enforced in extreme cases through the exercise of the ban. *Gelassenheit* included submission to the church community, civil authority and humility in personal conduct.

Ownership of land and participation in agriculture had particular significance. This became not only the Mennonite's crowning achievement in Russia but also their Achilles heel. Successful farmers rose to prominence in the church and civil institutions and became the models of the ideal Mennonite. Hard work, honest dealings and simple lifestyle were thought to be the keys to success. These values were assumed to be natural expressions of religious beliefs and the committed life. In the later years in Russia (1885-1917) higher education found acceptance but was reserved mainly for the elite. However, agriculture dominated the cultural ideals but the lack of a sufficient land base and a

growing landless population for whom these ideals were out of reach resulted in class divisions that plagued what some have termed the 'golden era' of Mennonite history (Dueck Films-When They Shall Ask)

Endogamous marriage as well as large families were the norm. While women shared in the Mennonite cultural ideals their role after marriage revolved primarily around child rearing and managing the household. While the official positions of authority were reserved for men, women were not without influence. L2's grandmother for example managed the family estate after the early death of her husband. Women were expected to assist in the agricultural enterprise on the land and in the village when needed. The extent of this participation depended in large measure on the size of the household and the financial status of the family.

L4 and L5 were subjects to these Russian Mennonite cultural expectations as they had been transplanted to Canada and additionally came under the influence of Canadian culture and North American religious currents.

The cultural expectations for third and fourth generation Canadian Mennonites growing up in B.C. involved some additional factors. Both L7 and L8 were socialized in a Mennonite dominated setting that is rapidly being urbanized. Agriculture is still valued but only accessible to a few. A strong work ethic still dominates. Independent entrepreneurship and professions in health, education and law have found acceptance. Success in this more urban setting is expressed in middle and upper class values. Entry into full membership in the church increasingly demands a personal conversion experience and assumes acceptance of a committed life even though the church lacks the coercive potential to enforce this as it did in more homogenous closed communities.

In many ways L6 shares in the general cultural expectations of the Mennonite tradition outlined above but from an oriental perspective. He represents the strong South East Asian strand that has been woven into the Mennonite community in the last twenty years. A work ethic and success orientation is an equally strong expectation. Personal conversion taken from an evangelical missionary background is combined with evidence of the committed life that includes the traditional elements of peace, mutual aid and philanthropy from the Anabaptist tradition.

## **Life History 1**

L1's life history has been dogged by the cultural ideals as they were held in the closed communities in Russia even though his direct participation was minimal until arriving in Canada. His

maternal and paternal grandparents were landless Mennonites who had left the colonies in the southern Russia in an attempt to take up homesteads in Siberia. Here extensive contact with Russian culture was unavoidable. His father became a tradesman in a city and his mother had been indentured to a non-Mennonite shopkeeper there. For a time as a child L1 lived in a remote Siberian detention camp. His father had refused the military draft and was assigned to work at the camp as a conscientious objector. As an only surviving child at the time L1's friends consisted of Russian peasant children, prisoners of war and convicts. The War years were followed by the Russian revolution and a period of anarchy which made their future even more tenuous. When the family emigrated to Canada in 1925 L1 was refused entry because of an eye infection. He lived with his aunt in the Ukraine, Moscow and England for 2 years before joining his parents in Saskatchewan at age 15. This period represents the first prolonged contact L1 had with the Mennonite community. In the mean time his education had been neglected.

In Canada his family finally settled in B.C. and L1 became an active member in the General Conference Mennonite church. He married at age 37 and has three children. He presently lives on the parcel of land he originally purchased in 1932.

L1's socialization was shaped by the Mennonite cultural ideals of his grandparents and parents as well as the exposure to Russian peasant culture and the need to hone his survival instincts in transit to Canada. An analysis of his life reveals that these experiences shaped his later adult behavior. While he valued and retained most Mennonite beliefs and practices he developed a strong sense of personal autonomy. His aggressive and independent manner strain the notion of traditional *Gelassenheit*. As a pioneer in the prairies and British Columbia in the 1930's land ownership and agriculture were a major preoccupation even though this needed to be supplemented with periodic outside employment and self employed entrepreneurship.

The life history of L1 as it is recorded appears to be punctuated more by adaptations than turning points. The main turning that can be identified was his marriage in 1939. Till that point the only significant others in his life had been his immediate family. His parents had survived the harshest possible conditions and L1 admired their perseverance, courage, innovativeness and hard work and followed their example. Growing up as the only surviving child and being left to his own devices for several years as an adolescent he developed into an self confident and independent adult. He was attracted to the authoritative personalities of Benjamin

Unruh and David Toews, two prominent Mennonite leaders in the migration of 1923-1930, but does not identify having had any lasting friendships until he met his wife. While he retained his former drive and brash disposition his energy became increasingly outward directed mainly towards his wife and three children but also into the community.

### **Life History Two**

L2 shares in the same cultural expectations and much of the history of L1 but under dramatically different circumstances. L2 socialization occurred in the context of the wealthy Mennonite elite in Southern Russia. His father had received a good formal education but had abandoned the teaching profession when the opportunity came to take possession of one third of his parents large estate (400 acres). Here L2 was introduced to the ideals of Mennonite culture without the constraints of village life. Even though the estate employed up to a dozen servants L2 was taught to work. At age eight he was expected to control a team of four horses. Education in German and Russian was provided by a private teacher hired by several estate owners. In the final year Ukrainian and English was also taught. At age 19 L2 received catechism instruction and was baptized into the village Mennonite church.

The Russian revolution and emigration to Canada intervened but the Mennonite cultural expectations continued to guide adult life colored by the privileged upbringing. When his father attempted to replicate the Russian estate in Canada L2 left the family farm, married his childhood sweetheart and established his own farm against his fathers wishes. His farming efforts in the prairies failed but an attempt on a smaller scale in British Columbia proved more successful. Here he was soon identified as clergy material and with the encouragement of his wife and family accepted the lifetime appointment to what at the time was a non professional position. During his lifetime he has held a number of important posts in Mennonite organizations and institutions. L2 was able to combine the Mennonite ideals of hard work, honesty and thrift with a measure of traditional Mennonite religious piety to retain a place among the elite in the culture.

### **Life History Three**

L3 grew up in a small Mennonite village in southern Russia and conformed to the Mennonite cultural ideals. She attended the village school, joined the local church and worked for her parents until her marriage at age 17. After marriage she joined her husband

who as the oldest son was obliged to work on his parents land and look after their welfare. When L3's husband entered service as a conscientious objector she took over many of his responsibilities at home.

The full impact of communism on the village did not occur until its forced collectivization around 1930. Mennonite institutions were collapsed and the culture suppressed as a new set of values were imposed on village life. Since her husband was among the landowners and ministers sent into Siberian exile she became the families sole breadwinner and had to raise their three children on her own. L3 was forced to accept the changes that were imposed on the village. Without the support of their traditional institutions and leaders Mennonite culture was forced underground.

L3 was briefly exposed to the dark side of German culture during the German occupation of southern Russia and later when the entire village was evacuated, ostensibly, to be relocated in Poland. The villagers were soon abandoned and left to survive as best they could. L3 with her three children along with a remnant of the village eventually found their way to Western Europe and were able to emigrate to Canada.

The main expectation placed on immigrants at that time was that they not become a charge to the public purse. Here the Mennonite values of hard work, honesty and thrift were in L3's favor as she and her children rebuilt their lives in Canada.

Throughout her adult life Mennonite cultural values seem to have dominated modified, to some extent, by the harsh experiences in communist Russia and as a refugee. Even though her religious socialization was interrupted at age 9 she attributes her survival to the spiritual values she did receive. As a single parent she developed an independence and determination that would not have been easily tolerated in the traditional village setting and stretches the ideal of *Gelassenheit*. Not only did she conform to the Mennonite ideal of work and thrift but when the opportunity arose she purchased land and became a successful farmer until her retirement. At age 83 she is actively involved in church life and as a volunteer in a number of local service and relief organizations.

#### **Life History Four**

L4's grandparents came from the Fuerstenland in southern Russia during the 1874 migration to Canada. Fuerstenland was a daughter colony set up to accommodate landless Mennonites in the main communities. The colony was situated on rented land and felt particularly vulnerable when a program of Russification was

introduced. They were drawn to Canada by a promise of land for their exclusive use and unhindered pursuit of their way of life. The Fuerstenlander's hoped to replicate the Mennonite ideals in a less hostile social climate on a firmer land base.

When L4's father married he had accumulated enough capital at various odd jobs to realize his dream of farming. Rather than settle in one of the Mennonite villages organized on the Russian village plan he elected to settle outside the Mennonite reserve on a farmstead near a town. As a result L4 did not experience the influence of closed village life during his formative years as most Mennonites did and was exposed to a variety of cultural perspectives that broadened his options as an adult. This facilitated attempts at innovation but proved risky in the social climate of the day.

L4 did not escape the Mennonite cultural expectations entirely. It was assumed he would join the Mennonite church and as the oldest son take up farming with his parents and care for them in their old age. Several factors intervened before he resigned himself to this inevitability. The culturally mixed community in which he grew up and its proximity to a small Canadian town meant L4 was exposed to nontraditional professions and attended school a public school instead of the Mennonite schools in the villages. The distance to the nearest Mennonite church meant they attended infrequently. Instead L4 attended Sunday School and later services conducted by Baptists at the local school. For a period during his public school years L4 boarded at the teachers residence because of the distance he lived from the school. The teacher who had been influenced by the proselytizing activities of the Mennonite Brethren among Mennonites of the *Kirchliche* tradition exposed him to North American evangelical thought as well as broadening his appreciation of nature and history by allowing him to explore his private library. During his high school experience at the Mennonite Educational Institute in Gretna he came under the influence of Benjamin Ewert. Ewert moved to Canada from Kansas with the express purpose of raising the educational standards in the Mennonite school system. To achieve this he impressed on his students their status as the vanguard of Mennonite cultural development. The exposure to Canadian culture and Ewert's critical attitude towards Mennonite culture in Manitoba instilled in L4 a sense of Canadian superiority both economically and culturally as well as a personal sense of inferiority. This feeling was particularly pronounced during WW1 and WW2 when Mennonites came under suspicion because of their German origin and refusal of the draft.

All of these experiences influenced L4's adult behavior. He made several attempts to enter non traditional professions in nearby towns and cities without success. He also aspired to become a teacher and after several attempts as a permit teacher in a Mennonite school and the public system completed normal school training in Manitoba. He studied theology for one year at a school with a fundamentalist orientation. He taught for several years in the public school system but eventually gave it up when opposition developed to his teaching style and theological orientation. At this point he resigned himself to the original expectations of an eldest son and returned to the family farm, married and settled down to raise a family. By then he was 35 and lacked the skills, incentive and energy needed to become successful at farming under the adverse conditions of the depression. He was active in the church in music and youth work and even though he had more education than most his lack of success in agriculture and the fact that he married late and had only one child put positions of status in the Mennonite community out of his reach. These were usually reserved for the more prosperous farmers with large families who could free them for the tasks involved. After his parents died he sold the family farm and moved to British Columbia to attempt a new beginning. Once here he took out membership in a Mennonite church but also cultivated relationships outside it. He continued to be a supporter of the church but was not involved in any official capacity. He took the unprecedented step of officially joining the Social Credit party and promoting their agenda among Mennonites. His fortunes though still precarious, improved enough for him to pursue his private interests in history and geography. With his wife he made five extensive trips exploring North and Central America and spent several longer periods in Mexico.

### **Life History Five**

The first 13 years of L5's life was spent in a Mennonite Board of Colonization experiment to replicate the closed Russian village pattern in Canada. The Board had sponsored her parents emigration from Russia in the 1920's and felt some obligation to assist their development here. The original vision was to establish a thriving agricultural community in which the Mennonite ideals in the *Kirchliche* tradition could be lived out but the climate and remoteness of the community proved unsuitable for these purposes. The community survived for a time on subsistence farming and pulp cutting. When this industry collapsed the community was disbanded. L5's primary socialization and education occurred in this closed

village setting. During this period she cannot recall consciously reflecting on her identity. Mennonite cultural ideals and expectations seem to have been assumed. A specific expectation that fell to her as the only daughter in the family was the mother's illness.

Once out of the closed community L5 encountered other demands. The environment to which she came was dominated by the Mennonite Brethren who had been influenced by German Pietists and Baptists in Russia and dispensationalism and fundamentalism in North America. They insisted that faith and the committed life were invalid without a specific personal conversion experience. This created a crisis of conscience for L5 that she struggled with into her teens.

Out of these diverse expectations L5 developed her adult identity. When her mother's condition deteriorated further she felt obligated to forego her own goals which included completing the final year at an evangelical non-denominational school. When her mother died it was assumed L5 would take full responsibility for the household. Since the family had a number of younger siblings and her father never remarried this became a permanent arrangement until they left home. At age 38 she finally felt free and moved to a distant city to find her independence. Here she was able to develop confidence in her own identity. With the exception of not marrying L5 met the expectations of Mennonite culture and expressed the ideal of *Gelassenheit* fully.

### **Life History Six**

L6 comes from a large city in South Vietnam. He was the son of a wealthy businessman who owned several factories. Till age twenty-one he attended school to prepare him to enter the family business. When the tide of the war changed he was part of a desperate effort to leave the country and served two and one half years in jail for trying to escape. During this experience and the ensuing uncertainty about his future he studied philosophy, and then turned to religion. He found the aesthetic quality of Buddhism impractical and after reading several books on Christianity in a local library he sought out a church and investigated further. After a time he became a believer.

Since his father's plans for his children could not be realized in Vietnam he became preoccupied with sending them to safety in the west. In 1978 after paying ten pieces of gold to the Vietnamese government, L6 was taken to a freighter along with 3500 others and delivered to Hong Kong where they were refused entry. After nine



months in the harbor the ship was intentionally run aground to force a landing. LH6 then applied to five countries and after one month was granted entry into Canada, the first country to respond. His first contact here was with the M.C.C. Resettlement Centre in Vancouver where a Vietnamese clergyman was working. Once there he was quickly drawn into a General Conference Mennonite church which had sponsored over 200 refugees like himself. While his first contact with Christianity in Vietnam was with the Christian and Missionary Alliance he was attracted to the Mennonite theological emphasis on peace and the synthesis of words and actions as demonstrated in the refugee sponsorship program.

L6 has combined his families expectations for his success and his new found religious convictions in his adult life. Once he was identified as a potential leader in the Chinese Christian community he carefully planned and conscientiously prepared for this task. He has received several post graduate degrees in religious education and theology. In the past two years he has taken up full time pastoral duties.

### **Life History Seven**

L7 is the daughter of a Mennonite farmer and attended a church with a narrow evangelical theology. In this context she felt she had been indoctrinated rather than taught. Acceptance and obedience to the church authorities was assumed. Questioning was frowned on. She followed the culturally expected route of joining the church, attending a church run private high school, married within the church and attended an evangelical Bible school.

During training for a health care profession her perspective broadened as did her circle of friends. Among these were several Mennonites from a more open tradition that encouraged theological debate and had a firmer grasp of the significance of the historical Anabaptist movement and Mennonite tradition.

At this point the demands of the committed life began to take shape. As a young family she and her husband sought out a theological school with an Anabaptist orientation and completed a degree program there. L7 is presently involved in a church vocation on a half-time basis but has not officially been accepted into the clergy.

### **Life History Eight**

LH8's parents have been involved in a variety of mutual aid and social service programs as full-time volunteers and professionals for all of their adult lives. From them L8 was socialized into the

committed life and has this expectation for herself. She attended a church with a evangelical orientation but with an appreciation of Anabaptism and Mennonite history. A personal conversion experience was seen as one possible entry into the committed life along with less dramatic forms of accepting the faith. The Sunday school and youth programs used a mixture of approaches to prepare her for the adult commitment of baptism and full membership.

L8 attended a private Mennonite high school but rejected its middle class influence and evangelical emphasis that marginalized the notion of community, peace and mutual aid of the Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition held and demonstrated by her parents. As a result she has chosen to live and study in an environment she feels is more conducive to these values.

## **Appendix D: THE IMPERIAL CHARTER OR CHARTER OF PRIVILEGES**

1. The religious freedoms and church practices have been granted. The privilege to "affirm" (say yes) instead of swearing an oath in court.
2. 65 dessiatines (about 160 acres) are allotted to each family. . . .
3. The establishment of factories and businesses is herewith granted.
4. A specific right is given to brew beer, vinegar and brandy. . . .
5. It is prohibited that strangers will sell brandy without permission of the Mennonites. . . .
6. The assurance of freedom from forced military or civil services for all Mennonites at present and in the future is granted. . . .
7. Exemption is granted from quartering military troops as well as the transportation of the latter. However, roads, bridges must be kept in good repair. . . .
8. Property ownership rights as well as the rights of inheritance and the orphan care are granted. . . .
9. Ten to fifteen years of exemptions from imperial taxes are given.
10. This charter not only confirms the privileges but also extends the assurance that assistance and protection will be given. . . .

Given in the city of Gatchino, the 6th of September 1800A.D. in the fourth year of our reign and the second as Grand Master.

Paul  
Count of Rostoptschin

(Kroeker, 1981: 19-20)

## **Appendix E: THE CANADIAN CHARTER FOR MENNONITE IMMIGRATION**

(The following is taken from a certified copy of the agreement entered into the privy council records and approved on August 13, 1873.)

P.C. 957 (A)

The arrangement made is to the following effect,

1st. That an entire exemption from any Military service, as is provided by law and order in Council, will be granted to the denomination of Christians called Mennonites.

2cd. That eight townships will be reserved, under the order in Council passed on the 3rd. March last, in the Province of Manitoba for free grants on the condition of settlement, as is provided in the Dominion Lands Act, that is to say, "any person who is the head of a family, or has attained the age of 21 years, shall be entitled to be entered for one quarter section or less a quantity of unappropriated Dominion Lands, for the purpose of securing homestead right in respect thereof."

3rd. The said reserve of eight townships to be for the exclusive use of the Mennonite settlers, and the free grants of one quarter section to consist of 160 acres as provided by the Act.

4th. That should the Mennonite settlement extend beyond the eight townships set aside by the order in Council of 3rd March last, other townships will be reserved to meet the full requirement of Mennonite immigration.

5th. If next spring the Mennonite settlers, on viewing the eight townships set aside for their use, should prefer to exchange them for any other eight unoccupied townships, such exchange will be allowed.

6th. That, in addition to the free grant of one quarter section to every person over 21 years of age, on condition of settlement, the right to purchase the remaining three-quarter of the section at one dollar per acre is granted, as provided by law, so as to complete the whole section.

7th. That the Mennonite settlers will receive a patent for a free grant after three years residence, in accordance with the terms of the Dominion Land Act.

8th. That, in the event of the death of the settler the lawful heirs can claim the patent for the free grant, upon proof that settlement duties for three years have been performed.

9th. That from the moment of occupation acquire a "homestead right" in the land.

10th. That the Mennonites will have the fullest privileges of exercising their religious principle and educating their children in schools, as provided by law, without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever.

11th. That they have the privilege of affirming, instead of making affidavit, as is provided by law.

12th. That the Government will undertake to furnish passenger warrants from Hamburg to Fort Garry for Mennonite families of good character for the sum of \$30.00 for every person over the age of eight years, half price or \$15.00 for persons under the age of eight years, and for infant under one year \$3.00.

13th. That the arrangements as to price shall not be changed during the seasons of 1874, 1875 and 1876.

14th. That, if such arrangement is changed after the year 1876 the price shall not, subject to the approval of Parliament, for a period to extend to the year 1882, exceed \$40.00 per adult, and for children in proportion.

15th. That the immigrants shall be provided with provisions during the portion of the journey between Liverpool and Collingwood, but that during other portions of the journey they are to find their own provisions.

He respectfully recommends that the arrangements as hereinbefore recited with the Mennonite delegates be concurred in.

The whole respectfully submitted,  
(SGD.) J.H. Pope,  
Minister of Agriculture.

Department of Agriculture,  
Ottawa, 28th July, 1873.

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