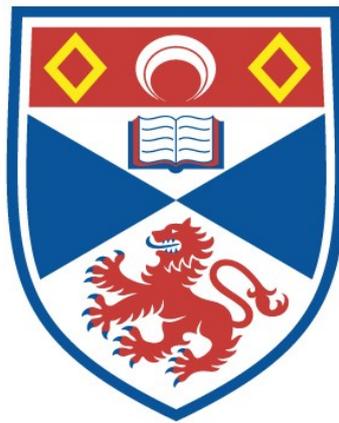


COUNTING THE COST : CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
AS A HERMENEUTICAL COMMUNITY

Andrew S. Hamilton

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
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ABSTRACT

Counting the Cost: Church of the Brethren as a Hermeneutical Community

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce the Church of the Brethren as a unique community sharing its tradition roots with both Radical Pietism and Anabaptism; to identify the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren; to define further what it means to be a "hermeneutical community"; and to describe the current hermeneutical perspective of the Church of the Brethren. This is all done to show the need for conversation regarding an hermeneutical strategy for the twenty-first century for the Church of the Brethren.

In the process of doing this, an underlying purpose will be to demonstrate that through the development of the Brethren community, specific changes occurred that have ultimately affected the way individuals in this community interpret scripture. Even as the Brethren have reinterpreted their core convictions to be a relevant witness to society, they have also been greatly influenced by society as well. Consequently, the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century Brethren are struggling with issues of individualism, identity, and witness. Therefore, if the CoB is to have an effective witness, it must deal with these issues that the community's hermeneutical strategy directly affects.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

"We hold that the Holy Scriptures are sufficient and more important than tradition. It is enough for us that our teaching and faith are grounded according to the Holy Scriptures on the rock of salvation, Jesus Christ."¹ -The Solingen Brethren

Purpose and Statement of Thesis

The goal of this thesis is to constructively articulate the present need for the Church of the Brethren, as a hermeneutical community to establish a hermeneutical strategy for the twenty-first century. To achieve this goal I will embark upon a brief telling of the Brethren story with the primary focus of defining the hermeneutical perspective of the CoB² both past and present. While the Brethren have continuously told their story and examined the roots of their identity over three centuries, the time has now come to critically examine their current identity in light of the past and in the hopes of future expectations.

Many fears in the fellowship centre around the dwindling numbers of membership, and concerns are being voiced regarding ambiguity in the current CoB identity and its witness to the world. Within the greater Christian community, theological conversations are also taking place regarding hermeneutical practices and the contribution of the community toward the interpretation of scripture. Thus while arguing this thesis, I will seek to contribute to this theological conversation.

The above quotation attributed to the Solingen Brethren duly expresses the commitment that this fellowship has had toward scripture throughout the centuries. And as this community continues to struggle with the current issues, the aim of this thesis is to redirect the attention of the fellowship back to the commitment Brethren have always held with scripture. The purpose of this thesis, then, is to critically examine the identity of the CoB in order to present their hermeneutical perspective as consisting of core convictions; to describe the biblical approach of

¹Donald Durnbaugh, European Origins of the Brethren. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1958), 245. This is an excerpt from the original account of their prison experience as told by William Grahe.

²Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the "Church of the Brethren" with the abbreviated form "CoB."

the Brethren and what role their convictions play in the interpretative process; to critically examine the changes that have taken place within these convictions over the centuries; and to demonstrate the need of the CoB to seek a hermeneutical strategy for the twenty-first century.

Flow of Argument

Chapter one's purpose is to provide a brief history that introduces the subject community that is central to the main argument. This chapter will begin to establish the identity of the CoB in respect to its historical inception so as to present the social-cultural milieu in which this "hermeneutical community" exists. Even as this history will be slanted toward the intended purpose of the rest of the thesis, I will also argue that this community finds its roots both in Radical Pietism and Anabaptism and that they considered themselves the gathering of the true church's remnant. Thus they experienced persecution at the hands of both Protestants and Catholics. Consequently the Early Brethren community chose to find havens where they could express their faith freely. Secondly, this history will provide an account of the exodus by the Early Brethren community to the new world and some of the challenges they faced. And finally, this first chapter will discuss the challenges of a primitive church entering the modern world and how they responded to Modernity.

Chapter two will focus upon the Early Brethren identity and hermeneutical perspective. I will argue that the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren was essentially affected by both Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. Thus, this chapter will define and describe Radical Pietism, and Anabaptism and their contribution to the Brethren identity. Special attention will be given to Vernard Eller's argument that the Brethren identity is a dialectic tension between Pietism and Anabaptism in which I will argue that it is not necessary to define the Brethren identity in this manner. Furthermore it is inadequate to describe them as Anabaptist over against Pietist and vice versa. Instead I will argue that their identity is a complex interrelationship of their unique narratives and convictions both of which derive from the Radical Pietists and Anabaptists. The Brethren identity is not duplicitous, but it is a unified interrelationship of their community's shared memories and the convictions they have discerned from scripture. Finally, in this chapter I will describe the Early Brethren Bible reading method that extends out of their identity.

Finally, chapter three sets out to answer the question "What does it mean to be a hermeneutical community?" Recognizing that John Howard Yoder popularized the term

"hermeneutical community" in the late 1960's, I will expand upon his idea by answering this question along other lines. I will argue that particular narratives act as interpretative lenses through which communities perceive reality and discern God's will for their direction. I will also argue that corporate remembrance calls the community to remember their origins in light of their current circumstances, and with the focus toward a hopeful future that continually draws them closer. Corporate remembrance affects the identity of the community and contributes to the interpretative lens through which they perceive. Finally, I will argue that the community, while sharing particular narratives that shape their perception and while they share a common commitment to a particular faith tradition, interprets scripture in relationship to these influences.

CHAPTER ONE
Who Are the Brethren?
"A Peculiar People"

Introduction

This first chapter does not set out to offer any original contribution. Its purpose is only to summarize the history following the best modern accounts so as to introduce the subject community that is central to the main argument. This summary will be angled toward the intended purposes of the rest of the thesis. In the process I will argue that the formation of a new community was primarily considered the gathering of the true church's remnant, thus resulting in persecution at the hands of both Protestants and Catholics. As a result of the persecutions, the Early Brethren³ community was forced to find havens where they could gather freely. Secondly, I will discuss the exodus by the Early Brethren community to the new world and some of the challenges they faced. Finally, this chapter will discuss the challenges of a primitive church entering the modern world and how such a peculiar community responded to Modernity. I will argue that while the CoB experienced the effects of Modernity they were able to avoid the extreme poles of Modernity.

More specifically, this chapter will provide a limited historiography of the CoB. From these sources (as well as some others) I will then offer a historical sketch from their formation to the present. The purpose of this chapter is not to offer a comprehensive history of the Church of the Brethren nor is it to give a developmental history of its doctrine. Its purpose is to begin establishing the identity of the CoB (Church of the Brethren) in respect to its historical inception so as to present the social-cultural milieu in which this "hermeneutical community" exists. The intention here is to provide enough background to set up the second chapter which will offer a more comprehensive definition of the Early Brethren's hermeneutical perspective and interpretative methodology. Therefore, the importance of this chapter is to effectively offer a fair and consistent rendering of the CoB's identity and introduce themes which will be particularly

³It is essential to understand that the focus of this study is the Church of the Brethren. However, it must be acknowledged that the "Early Brethren" are the source of several contemporary denominations. Therefore, when referring to the Brethren fellowship before the schisms occurred I will refer to them as the "Early Brethren."

significant later in the thesis.

Brief Summary of Brethren Historiography

Over the last century, particularly the last half, there has been a plethora of articles and texts written regarding Brethren history. Because the primary purpose of this thesis is not to produce yet another history, I will limit the historical resources to those that will best serve the task of this thesis. Therefore this section is by far not a comprehensive Brethren historiography. For this summary I will rely upon texts from three major time periods: early twentieth century, mid-twentieth century, and late twentieth century.

In 1899, Martin Grove Brumbaugh wrote the first major history of the German Baptist Brethren.⁴ While Brumbaugh is certainly not the first to be concerned about Brethren historiography, he is the first to offer a significant history of Brethren beginnings.⁵ In his work, he sets out to distinguish the Brethren as a distinctive fellowship. His purpose is to offer an explanation of who the German Baptist Brethren are as well as to clear the many misrepresentations of their identity.⁶ This, however, is an apologetic work setting out to legitimize the distinctive nature of the Brethren identity. Thus there is conspicuous romanticism in the language used to portray this fellowship.⁷

⁴Martin Grove Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America. Elgin: Brethren Publishing House, 1899).

⁵Brumbaugh relied heavily upon sources from Abraham Harley Cassel's collection. In the nineteenth century Cassel began showing an increasing interest in Brethren history. His most notable accomplishment toward this interest was that he began acquiring and accumulating a large collection of books, letters, and other writings regarding the Early Brethren.

⁶In the preface of his work he clearly states that scholars, up until that point in time, were widely mistaken as to who the German Baptist Brethren (now the Church of the Brethren) were. In his preface he states that the Brethren had been "widely misrepresented," and by this they were often "confused with the Pietists, the Mennonites, the Ephrata community of Seventh Day Baptists, the Amish, the Wissahickon Hermits, the Separatists, the New Born, and all sorts of new Anabaptist societies and sects" (xiii).

⁷Brumbaugh uses romantic language and metaphors as he retells seminal narratives of the Brethren. An example of this follows: "Doubly memorable Christmas Day, 1723! Christ's anniversary and the date of the birth of His church in America! There is an activity at Peter Becker's house in Germantown. The spindles are still; and the voice of praise is raised. Six persons . . . all from what is now the Coventry district, were preparing to hold the first immersion in the church in America . . . The group kneels. Overhead the solemn sentinels of the forest fastness—the pines and hemlock—are stilled. The ice-bound stream utters strangely solemn music. Curious eyes from the Kelpianites rest reverently

In 1935 another significant work emerged, although Brethren history was not its primary purpose. This time it came from Germany. Heinz Renkewitz, a Moravian, wrote a biography of Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau entitled, Hochmann Von Hochenau: 1670-1721. Renkewitz rightly argues that the Early Brethren were followers of Hochmann. Specifically concerning the formation of the Brethren *Gemeinde*, he says regarding the formation of the fellowship, "It was not the need for a more organized fellowship instead of a loose circle of followers around Hochmann, but the determination to live perfectly according to the command and model of Christ which led to the introduction of baptism."⁸ Renkewitz argues that the Brethren fellowship emerged out of the conviction for radical discipleship rather than for establishing another more committed congregation. In addition, Renkewitz argues that the Early Brethren were closely connected with Hochmann and in fact relied upon his confession of faith, which the Early Brethren took with them when they emigrated to North America.⁹

Following Renkewitz, the only other significant work in the early twentieth century regarding the Brethren comes from the Mennonite, Robert Friedmann. In the 1940's Friedmann published a series of articles and a monograph regarding Anabaptism and Pietism.¹⁰ While describing the differences and similarities Anabaptism and Pietism share, of particular interest to this thesis Friedmann acknowledges that the Brethren were an attractive community to the Anabaptists. In a far more recent work Dale Stoffer echoes Friedmann's recognition that the Brethren received many converts from the Mennonite community, while not losing any Brethren to the Mennonites.¹¹

upon the group" (155-156). This brief passage illustrates the apologetic purpose of portraying the Early Brethren *Gemeinde* as a legitimate faith fellowship.

⁸Heinz Renkewitz, Hochmann Von Hochenau, 1670-1721, translated by William G. Willoughby. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1993), 99.

⁹Ibid., 106. Further emphasizing the significance of Brumbaugh's work, Renkewitz relies upon Brumbaugh for the information regarding the Brethren's possession of Hochmann's confession. Much like Brumbaugh, Renkewitz asserts that one cannot surmise that Hochmann's confession became the encompassing norm for the Brethren community. Instead he says that it only reflects that the Brethren community shared the same convictions as Hochmann (107).

¹⁰Robert Friedmann, "Anabaptism and Pietism," Mennonite Quarterly Review. XIV: 1: 1941; Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1949).

¹¹Dale R. Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines, 1650-1987. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1989), 57.

The mid point of the 20th century proved to be particularly fruitful for research regarding Brethren origins. Three major theses were written between 1950 and 1960 about the identity of the Brethren. This, however, does not include the many periodical articles debating the arguments of these works.¹² Beginning in 1951, William Willoughby completed his doctoral thesis entitled, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren, 1706-1735. This work is of particular significance, especially for this thesis, because it is the first to trace the development of Brethren beliefs from both Pietism and Anabaptism. Willoughby not only discerns the beliefs and convictions held by the Early Brethren but he also evaluates them concluding that the primary conviction of the Brethren which will be sustained into the future is that of "no force in religion."¹³ In the process of arriving at this conclusion Willoughby provides many helpful insights in his analysis of the beliefs held by Church Pietists, Radical Pietists, Anabaptists, and the Early Brethren. By doing this he offers helpful comparisons not only of their beliefs but of their source and development as well. In his final analysis, he sees both Pietism and Anabaptism providing equal influence in the development of the Brethren beliefs.¹⁴

Following Willoughby was another Brethren scholar, Chauncey David Ensign. Unlike Willoughby, Ensign centred his thesis upon Radical Pietism. Ensign argued that, as has been widely acknowledged, the Early Brethren emerged directly out of Radical Pietism. In addition he disputed Willoughby's analysis that saw the Brethren identity as being equally Anabaptist and Pietist, and himself argued that the obvious similarities between the Anabaptists and Radical Pietists demonstrates that the Brethren did not necessarily move out of Radical Pietism and into Anabaptism.¹⁵ Rather, they remained Radical Pietists while affirming the outward practice of

¹²In 1955 Brethren Life and Thought published its first issue. This journal extends directly from the Church of the Brethren and discusses themes regarding Brethren historiography as well as current issues in the church. Many of the responses to the major works as stated above were printed in this journal. Following Ensign's thesis, Donald Durnbaugh published an article criticizing Ensign's emphasis upon Radical Pietism as the central factor in Brethren identity ("Genius of the Early Brethren," BLT. Parts I & II: nos. 1 & 2: 1959.).

¹³William G. Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren, 1706-1735. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1999), 82.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹⁵David Chauncey Ensign, "Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)." (Boston: Boston University Doctoral Dissertation, 1955), 277ff. This, as of today, is the only existing monograph dealing specifically with the subject of German Radical Pietism.

faith held by the Anabaptists. "In fact," Ensign says, "it is impossible to relate the Brethren to their pietistic background without a realization of the fact that they were radical Pietists."¹⁶ Thus it is only in the light of Radical Pietism that one can understand who the Brethren are.

The third major thesis came in 1960. In it, Donald Durnbaugh argues contrary to Ensign, that while the Brethren certainly emerged from within the Radical Pietist movement, they ultimately separated from Radical Pietism and adopted Anabaptist ecclesiology as they formed a new community.¹⁷ This text is formatted almost identically to his earlier published text European Origins of the Brethren with exception of the final chapters.¹⁸ In Brethren Beginnings, Durnbaugh traces the origins of the Brethren in seven stages. He begins with the first chapter describing the Brethren roots in Radical Pietism. The second chapter discusses the community's separation from the established churches moving next to their formation of a new community. This development is continued through the expansion of the Brethren movement to the persecution and suppression of it and then to their emigration to North America. Durnbaugh concludes his thesis arguing that "the genius of the early Brethren lies in their conscious adoption of the Anabaptist tradition."¹⁹ Thus much like his contrary argument with Ensign he concludes that the Early Brethren left Radical Pietism behind them and re-emerged as Anabaptists.

Two years prior to his thesis, Durnbaugh published what is often considered the quintessential work on Brethren origins: European Origins of the Brethren. This text is an essential compilation of primary source material which was nearly inaccessible and probably unknown previous to this publication. Durnbaugh outlines this work in a manner which he also used for his doctoral thesis that followed. It traces the origin of the Early Brethren in seven stages: introduction²⁰, separation, formation, expansion, suppression, emigration, and

¹⁶Ibid., 9.

¹⁷Donald F. Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1992). This is a recent publication of the original dissertation.

¹⁸Donald F. Durnbaugh, European Origins of the Brethren. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1958).

¹⁹Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings, 64.

²⁰Durnbaugh, European Origins of the Brethren, 20-36. In the introduction, he provides the historical-social milieu from which the Early Brethren emerged. Most importantly, he sets the immediate context of the Early Brethren as being Radical Pietists.

publication.

In 1961 Vernard Eller published a widely read and influential article regarding the Brethren identity.²¹ In his article Eller argues that the Brethren identity lies in a dialectic tension which exists between the inward nature of Radical Pietism and the outward nature of Anabaptism. Eller makes his argument using Alexander Mack's symbol as an illustration.²² Eller's argument has spurred much debate as to the identity of the Brethren.

1980 brought with it Dale Stoffer's doctoral dissertation, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines: 1650-1987. This work is of central interest to this thesis because as Stoffer sets out to trace the development of Brethren doctrines and their theological method, he draws several conclusions regarding the theological method of the Brethren. He says, "believers are directed to the church as the place where God's will is to be worked out in and through them."²³ He continues further regarding the Christ-centredness of Brethren thought, saying, "This life is exemplified in Christ and made possible through His atoning death; it is delimited in Scripture and formed in believers by the power of the Holy Spirit; though necessarily beginning individually, its ultimate fulfilment is attained in *community*."²⁴ Thus the heart of this thesis is based upon the understanding that the Brethren are a hermeneutical community. This will be especially significant in chapter three.

Another perspective on the development of the Brethren community was published in 1985 by Roger E. Sappington.²⁵ In this work, Sappington traces the development of the Brethren community as it faced the rapid industrialization of America between 1865 and 1915. Sappington's focus of study was the leadership of the Brethren during these years and how they led the way to Brethren expansion. Much like Durnbaugh's European Origins of the Brethren,

²¹The extent of its influence is demonstrated by the ongoing interest instigated by Eller's argument. Examples of these is found in Dale Brown's article "Membership in the Body of Christ as Interpreted by the Heritage of the Brethren," (BLT, IX: 4: 1964: 63-77), as well as the more recent conversation we find with Eller's article by both Dale Stoffer [Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines: 1650-1987, (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1989)] and Carl F. Bowman [Brethren Society, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995)].

²²Alexander Mack drew a picture of a cross with a heart at the cross bar and bearing fruit from vines. This has become a symbol of the Church of the Brethren.

²³Stoffer, Background and Development, 243.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Roger E. Sappington, The Brethren in Industrial America. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1985).

Sappington compiled a selective collection of published material in order to trace the Brethren development during the industrial age.

Like Sappington, Stoffer, Durnbaugh and the others, Carl F. Bowman published another important study in 1995 from a sociological perspective.²⁶ In his study, Bowman describes the cultural transformation of the Brethren community. The most significant areas of his study pertain to the reinterpretations of the Brethren community's core convictions and his excursus regarding the relationship of Pietism and Anabaptism to the Brethren identity. In this section Bowman engages Eiler's argument that the Brethren identity is a dialectic tension.

Finally, most recently Donald Durnbaugh published yet another volume of Brethren history. Durnbaugh states that his intention is for this study to be a social history.²⁷ By social history, he is meaning to tell the Brethren story within the contexts of the societies in which they lived from the formation of their community to their present state (in 1995). Durnbaugh relies upon numerous resources in this narrative about the Church of the Brethren. In his closing chapter, Durnbaugh expresses the rising concern within the denomination as to its declining roll. He explains that consequently new evangelistic efforts within the denomination have begun. It is interesting that in this final chapter he also acknowledges the identity crisis that is troubling the CoB, but instead of dealing with significant issues of identity the topic of name change for the denomination is emphasized. He purposely leaves the reader with the perspectives of how the Early Brethren sought to form an identity in Schwarzenau and how the CoB has sought to define their identity at the turn of the twenty-first century. As stated previously, this is by no means a comprehensive historiography of the Brethren community. However, it is a solid foundation from which to write a brief history of the Church of the Brethren in this first chapter.

A Brief History

From Pietism to Radical Pietism

Due to abuses within the Catholic church, many people found reasons for breaking away from the church. From the perspective of many German people, the Catholic church was draining an empty bowl. They were taking from people who were already poor and still suffering from decades of war. It was for these reasons that so many supported Luther in his protest. As

²⁶Bowman, Brethren Society.

²⁷Donald Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1997), x.

the Protestant churches grew coupled with the growth of scholasticism, it became noticeable that many of the same problems were also arising within the Protestant churches. In them the people found forceful dogmatics that were set to keep their beliefs pure. This resulted in a religious oppression comparable to that which occurred in Catholicism. So as the Reformation continued to proceed, a renewal movement began within the Protestant churches. This movement was called Pietism and began in northern provinces. Pietism was a religious renewal movement that reacted to the emotional sterility of the established churches. They responded to the dogmatism of the church leaders and the scholasticism of the day. Durnbaugh cites a seventeenth century quotation from a professor in Leipzig, which plainly states the heart of Pietism.

The name Pietist is known all over the city. What is a Pietist? One who studies God's word and leads a holy life in accord with it.²⁸

It was with this same fervour that people were thirsting for a revitalized worship and study of scripture, but within the Protestant church as well as the Catholic the Pietists saw dogmatic ritualism. As a result of the dogma, these people encountered the same intolerance for their beliefs as the Protestants initially encountered from the Catholics, only this time intolerance was found from both Protestant and Catholic alike.²⁹ Yet in the face of such resistance individuals would rise to the occasion in order to bring life back to the church, people such as Johann Arndt, Philipp Jacob Spener, Gottfried Arnold, and Ernst Christoph Hochmann.

Johann Arndt (1555-1621), considered one of the fathers of Lutheran Pietism, taught

²⁸Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 8.

²⁹For a more thorough discussion of Pietist development, see the following: a good introduction to Pietism is Dale E. Brown, Understanding Pietism. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978); the definitive work of Pietist history is the four volume German work, Martin Brecht, Geschichte des Pietismus: Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert. (Göttingen: , 1993), Geschichte des Pietismus: Der Pietismus des 18. Jahrhunderts. (Göttingen: , 1995); a thorough work regarding Radical Pietism, though somewhat dated, is David C. Ensign, "Radical German Pietism." (Ph.D. dissertation: Boston University Graduate School, 1955); a study, whose primary thesis is the initial development of the Brethren identity, offers a very limited explanation and history of Pietism is Donald F. Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: The Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1992), 1-7; a more detailed study of Pietism can be found in the two volumes of F. Ernest Stoeffler, The Rise of Evangelical Pietism. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), and German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973); a more recent work that offers some development of Pietism from a Brethren perspective is Dale R. Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1989), 5-43; William G. Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren: 1706-1735. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1999), 27-41, also offers a limited development and history of Pietism from a Brethren perspective.

"the necessity of man's spiritual renewal through God's gracious work."³⁰ His teaching was that through the Word, the Holy Spirit, and Christ the individual would be renewed "from the inside out."³¹ The purpose for this renewal movement was to bring life back into the church. Thus, it quickly spread throughout the Lutheran churches in Germany. William G. Willoughby expresses the wide extent of Church Pietism in his thesis as such:

The Pietistic movement was a wide-ranging religious phenomenon in Germany, in Holland, in the Scandinavian countries, in England, and even in America. Although it was bitterly denounced by some clergy, it generally made a positive impact on the Lutheran, Reformed, and Mennonite Churches. All of the Early Brethren, almost certainly, spent some time as Church Pietists before they left the institutional Church.³²

Members of this movement, while they remained members of Lutheranism, would meet in small groups for Bible study, hymn singing, and prayer. The initial purpose was not to start a new church but to bring renewal to the existing one.

Another Lutheran pastor, Philipp Jacob Spener, has also been considered one of the fathers of Lutheran Pietism. Spener emphasized personal piety in conjunction with academic instruction. He is best known for his essay *Pia Desideria*, a book which stimulated further outbreaks of pietism with more people forming small groups and meeting for Bible study, prayer, and hymn singing.³³ These groups were soon attacked by the church and accused of being "hotbeds of heresy."³⁴ However, like Arndt, Spener's purpose was not to create a new denomination. His desire was to reform the evangelical church by returning a revitalized spirit to it.

Regardless of these efforts, some people were not satisfied with the slow movement of change and the animosity they encountered on account of their desire to study scripture and worship. In addition they could not accept the perceived errors of the church, i.e. dogmatism, rationalism, worship services filled with rituals. During this time laws were strictly enforced and any slight deviation from orthodoxy would draw punitive results. Thus, any small group of

³⁰Dale R. Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 12.

³¹Ibid.

³²Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 27.

³³Ibid., 28.

³⁴Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History. (Philadelphia; American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), 527.

individuals gathering for Bible study would be treated as criminals.³⁵ The slow process of reform in the institutional church coupled with the harsh treatment they received caused them to leave the institutional church. These were considered the Radical Pietists.

An early influence upon Radical Pietism was Jakob Boehme. This shoemaker strongly criticized the institutional church calling it the "great harlot." He emphatically urged people to separate from the institutional church. Through his writings he led many to the belief that in order to experience union with the Divine Wisdom (Sophia), one must not marry. As noted by Durnbaugh these beliefs were a particular struggle for the Early Brethren.³⁶ Stoffer sums up Boehme's legacy saying, "The main legacy of Jakob Boehme to Radical Pietism consisted of his theosophical speculations concerning God, the creation, the fall, and redemption and his profoundly critical attitude toward accepted theological and ecclesiastical norms."³⁷ Boehme's mystical beliefs greatly affected the Early Brethren.³⁸

A more important figure in Radical Pietism, however, was Gottfried Arnold. While Boehme offered a highly mystical influence upon the Early Brethren, Arnold's influence was highly intellectual. His influence came especially through his historical writing, *Die Erste Liebe Der Gemeinen Jesu Christi. Das ist: Wahre Abbildung Der Ersten Christen* (1696).³⁹ This book

³⁵Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995*. 10.

³⁶Ibid., 11.

³⁷Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*. 19.

³⁸F. Ernst Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 170-171. Stoeffler explains the nature of Boehme's beliefs as seeking spiritualized mystical union with God. Stoeffler says, "He made the distinction between the Church of Cain and the Church of Abel, the former referring to the church visible in history, the latter to all who are experientially, effectively, united with God be they living or 'dead' (171)." For Boehme, the existential working of the Spirit in the life of the individual supersedes any intellectual rendering of the where, how or when the Spirit works. Stoeffler further explains this Boehmist union in his footnote as a "matter of experiencing God through an affective response to him (170)."

³⁹An interesting note of reference here is that while Stoffer asserts this as the most important book for the Early Brethren, Durnbaugh, on the other hand, states that Arnold's later work *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-historie* is more important. Perhaps the difference in opinion is merely that of perspective or perhaps that of denomination. The later book could be considered the most important work for Arnold, while the first one, which deals with early church history, would have been more important to the Early Brethren. Nevertheless, it could rightly be a difference of opinion in that Durnbaugh sees the second work being more important for the Church of the Brethren over the long run, especially with Willoughby's conclusion that one of the core beliefs of the CoB is "no force in religion." It is this writer's opinion that the first was initially of primary importance while the second has had continued effects upon the CoB over time.

became the source used by the Early Brethren for discerning the practices of the early church. Arnold was the intellectual foundation of Radical Pietism as well as for the formation of the Early Brethren. It was Arnold's teachings that would provide the greatest impact upon Early Brethren interpretative methods. Arnold said that the test of the true church was not its orthodoxy but its orthopraxis.⁴⁰ His statements concerning the church and persecution also affected core beliefs of the Radical Pietists and the Early Brethren. Concerning this he said, "The church has always flowered best under the cross; it was never a majority and the persecutor but rather the minority and the persecuted."⁴¹

A friend to Arnold, Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hohenau, had the greatest impact upon the Early Brethren. Hochmann was an itinerant preacher who travelled extensively throughout Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Durnbaugh offers three basic themes, which his preaching followed: "1) he had been called by Christ to preach the gospel; 2) there is a spiritual church; 3) the kingdom of Christ is at hand."⁴² Of all the Radical Pietists none had greater influence over the Early Brethren than Hochmann. Hochmann, in fact, was the spiritual father of many of the first Brethren. His most significant writing was his "statement of beliefs." This statement was written in 1702 for the purpose of obtaining his own prison release.⁴³ Willoughby states that the Early Brethren probably never had his early statement in their possession as a written document.⁴⁴ However important this writing was, Hochmann's significance, Stoffer says, "lies not in his writings but in the people whose lives he touched."⁴⁵ It is doubtless that Hochmann was a sure presence among the Early Brethren. It is widely acknowledged that Hochmann served as Alexander Mack's mentor, thus insuring the influence of these beliefs within the Brethren *Gemeinde*.⁴⁶ Hochmann was brought up in the Lutheran

⁴⁰As cited by Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 12.

⁴¹Ibid., 12.

⁴²Ibid., 13.

⁴³Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 57.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987. 36.

⁴⁶The lexical translation of *Gemeinde* is congregation, corporate body, community, and even parish. However as is quite often so with all translation, the term carries greater connotations with it. In the Brethren Encyclopedia, 534, Vernard M. Eller says the word is built upon a root word meaning

faith even though close relatives, including his mother, were Catholic.⁴⁷ At an early age he went to Halle to hear Thomasius lecture on law. It was here that he came into contact with a student of Gottfried Arnold, whose name was August Hermann Francke.⁴⁸ This event "awakened" Hochmann to the pietistic teachings. Not long after this event he was expelled from Halle for his criticism of the state church. Hochmann continued to travel and wander around Germany preaching and consequently experiencing persecution.

In 1706(07), Hochmann met Alexander Mack in the Marienborn area.⁴⁹ Following this meeting, Mack invited Hochmann to visit him in Schriesheim where Mack resided and operated a clothing mill. Durnbaugh describes the meetings that took place as follows:

Hochmann began to hold meetings in the large room of Mack's mill, also preaching in the streets to workers who were returning to their homes in the village after laboring in the fields. According to local officials, more than fifty had joined the Pietistery and hundreds more would have come if the visitors had not been driven from Schriesheim.⁵⁰

These meetings had an astounding impact upon the community. Out of fear that this small group might spread and increase beyond control, the authorities arrested Hochmann and drove the visitors out of the area. The inevitable arrest of Hochmann did not stymie the eagerness of the people to hear his pietistic teachings. Durnbaugh goes on to say:

Hochmann and the others were sentenced to hard public labor on a bread and water diet. The punishment, however, backfired, for many churchgoers from Mannheim flocked to the embankment where Hochmann was working, so that they could hear him speak. Beatings failed to stop the nobleman from preaching and only earned him more sympathy from the onlookers.⁵¹

"common." In addition he says that in German *Gemeinde* is used when referring to the faith community, whether it is designating a local or a larger community. This term also connotes Christian communion. For the Early Brethren there is always a sense of commonality included in it. In Robert Friedmann's, The Theology of Anabaptism. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 43, he says that *Gemeinde* "is a gathering of the reborn, an attempt to translate the kingdom idea into practical forms of everyday living—if not in terms of the fullness of the kingdom itself, then at least in what it foreshadows." In this sense the term not only refers to the "living faith community," but it is also an eschatological term that directs the focus of the community to a promised and hoped for future.

⁴⁷Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America. 17.

⁴⁸Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 19.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 19-20.

After Hochmann's release and subsequent expulsion from the Palatinate, Mack was forced to decide what he should do. If he were to remain in the Palatinate, he would have to renounce his pietistic faith. Consequently he chose to remain true to his convictions and loyal to his faith. Thus he sold his inheritance, gathered his family and they moved to Schwarzenau.⁵²

A New Gemeinde

Having found a haven in which they could exercise religious freedom, Alexander Mack and company settled among a variety of other separatists. It was within this community the Early Brethren *Gemeinde* was formed. Durnbaugh explains that a group of people within the Schwarzenau community came across Matthew 28 in their search for obedience to Christ's commandments, and they were confronted with Jesus' command for baptism.⁵³ However, due to the opposition experienced within the community, these individuals let the matter drop. In 1706, two foreign brethren, possibly Dutch Collegiants, visited them proclaiming the need for adult believer baptism. This occurrence caused the group to search the scriptures.⁵⁴ It is following this extensive study and soul searching that the most momentous event in Brethren history occurs. Brumbaugh eloquently describes the following scene of 1708:

In that year at Schwarzenau, Province of Wittgenstein, in Hesse-Cassel, was enacted a remarkable scene. Eight pious souls, after careful prayer and prolonged study, relying only upon God and the Bible to guide them and their followers forever, walked slowly, solemnly and heroically from the house of Alexander Mack to the river Eder, which, like a silver thread, wound its way through the heart of a rich and varied landscape. Here the pious eight, in the early morning, surrounded by many curious witnesses, knelt in prayer, and then one of them led Alexander Mack into the water and immersed him three times, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Then Alexander Mack baptized the other seven, and these eight, perhaps the first to receive trine immersion in the history of the Protestant Church, then organized a new congregation.⁵⁵

⁵²Ibid., 20.

⁵³Ibid., 26-27.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Brumbaugh, *A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America*, 28. While Brumbaugh notes that the formation of the new *Gemeinde* was a result of study and prayer, it must also be recognized, as Durnbaugh has, that this was probably instigated by the "blasphemous sexual excesses" of the infamous Buttler Gang. The extent of impiety shown by this Radical Pietist group probably provided enough fear of extreme individualism to cause Alexander Mack and his group to desire

This was the formation of the Early Brethren in Schwarzenau, Germany. Of the original eight, Brumbaugh reports that six originally came from the Reformed tradition and two from the Lutheran.⁵⁶ The initial formation was only a beginning, however, because this small group had a long road ahead of them.

In the years following their formation, the Brethren experienced significant growth. Along with this growth came recognition and ultimately opposition. Wherever the Brethren found themselves, they experienced persecution. However they were fortunate for the century in which they lived. A century earlier Anabaptists experienced execution for the same activity as the Brethren. In the early part of the eighteenth century the persecution was milder. Rather than execution for their baptist activities, various Brethren were sentenced to life in prison, hard labour, or the galleys. Christian Liebe is an example of a Brethren leader who was sentenced to the slave galleys for his intent to baptize.⁵⁷ In addition to Liebe, Durnbaugh also includes the account of the Solingen Brethren who were arrested for being baptized.⁵⁸ The Solingen Brethren were given the opportunity to recant and be freed but instead stood upon scripture denying infant baptism and thus remaining in prison. Likewise, Brethren experienced varying forms of persecution throughout Germany.

Over the years there has been much discussion as to who the Early Brethren were regarding their faith tradition, i.e., whether primarily Radical Pietists or Anabaptists. In his work entitled, Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth Century Europe, Durnbaugh says in his concluding sentence, "the Brethren originally *came* out of radical Pietism, but they later *came out* of Radical Pietism and accepted Anabaptism."⁵⁹ In this sense, Durnbaugh is suggesting that when the Early Brethren decided to form a new

a disciplined community. Durnbaugh expresses the probable effect that the Buttler Gang had upon the Early Brethren, saying, "No doubt the Buttler scandal had sobered many. The problem of discipline was insoluble without some form of church organization, they decided" (Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: The Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe, 21).

⁵⁶Ibid., 33.

⁵⁷A detailed account of this is found in Durnbaugh, European Origins of the Brethren. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1958.), 217ff.

⁵⁸Ibid., 240ff.

⁵⁹Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: The Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe, 64.

congregation based upon New Testament principles, they “broke” from radical Pietism.⁶⁰ For Durnbaugh, this “sharp break” was the a virtual discarding of radical Pietism in favour of Anabaptism. While Durnbaugh does admit that there still exist tell-tale signs of Radical Pietism within the CoB, he clearly suggests that the primary resemblance is to Anabaptism.

On the other hand, Willoughby finds striking similarities between the Early Brethren and both the Pietists (or Church Pietists) and the Radical Pietists. In his thesis titled, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735, he provides five similar beliefs which the church Pietists held in common with the Early Brethren and four that the Radical Pietists held in common with the Early Brethren. Concerning the similar beliefs of the Church Pietists, he offers,

First:: Religion is fundamentally experiential, emotional, of the heart and not the head. . . Second: In order to cultivate the religious experience, the Christian must engage in devotional exercise . . . Third: Bible reading is a fertile source of religious feelings concerning God, Christ, and the edification of one’s soul . . . Fourth: Christian faith is expressed in one’s personal moral behavior . . . Fifth: Service to those in need.⁶¹

These five beliefs held by the Church Pietists, while bearing no striking similarity to those of the Early Brethren, would have been generally accepted and acknowledged by the Early Brethren.⁶² Regarding the Radical Pietists’ beliefs, Willoughby offers four with which the Early Brethren agreed:

First: The State churches were religiously corrupt and were not the true church . . . Second: The established churches did not cultivate a vital relationship with God . . . Third: True Christianity could be found outside the State churches . . . Fourth: Universal Restoration.⁶³

As can be seen there are many similarities between the Pietists and the Early Brethren. Thus it is difficult to discern the extent to which the Early Brethren shed their Pietistic coat.

⁶⁰Ibid., 61.

⁶¹Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 30.

⁶²Ibid., 65-66. Willoughby offers six succinct statements of what the Early Brethren believed: “1. In the spiritual autonomy of the church; 2. The immersion of adults was the New Testament form of baptism; 3. That the Love Feast Service consists of feet-washing, an *Agape* meal, and the bread and the cup; 4. The *Gemeinde* is a disciplined community of regenerate Christians; 5. The obedient disciple of Jesus does not engage in violence—either in religion or in human relations; 6. Eventually all human beings will be redeemed through the boundless love of God, but those who die unregenerate will suffer proportionately for their evil in hell.” In addition, Willoughby includes a comprehensive comparison of beliefs regarding the Brethren, Protestant teachings, Pietists, Anabaptists. These conclusive statements concerning the beliefs of the Early Brethren are essential for understanding the complexity of influence they hold.

⁶³Ibid., 39.

Furthermore, there is an overlap in beliefs between the Anabaptists and the Pietists, perhaps offering an explanation for the vague distinctions between both groups and the Early Brethren. While Durnbaugh is surely correct that the Early Brethren broke away from the Radical Pietists, it can also be equally argued that their Pietist roots are still very evident in their hermeneutical perspective. The primary difference between the Early Brethren and the Radical Pietists was that while both believed themselves to be the "root" of the true church, the Early Brethren believed it necessary to form an organized body of worship.⁶⁴ The Radical Pietists, on the other hand, emphasized the individual. Even though they had made a "sharp break" with Radical Pietism, their world-view was very much shaped by Pietism. This particular point will be established in the following chapter.

The primary tenets of Pietism can be seen in the earlier definition offered. Pietists were primarily concerned with the study of scripture and with the direct correlated response of living out the scripture. Stoffer acknowledges a key element which attracted the Anabaptists to Pietism, namely, its "warmth and zeal."⁶⁵ The Pietists exuded a passion and enthusiasm that may have been lacking in the Anabaptists but shared with the Early Brethren. As many early critics noted, Pietism's greatest weakness was that it would inevitably lead to extreme separatism. The extent to which Radical Pietism evolved testifies to this fact. Radical Pietism was also highly spiritual and concerned with the mystical experiences of religion, e.g., Jakob Böhme. As will be seen, this became a divisive issue among the Early Brethren after settling in North America. The foremost connection that Pietism had with the Early Brethren was that they had all left the institutional church via Radical Pietism. Thus the conclusion can be drawn that at least initially the Early Brethren were Pietists.⁶⁶ Thus it must be considered that the Early Brethren were essentially Radical Pietists in that they received sufficient conviction through the teachings of Pietism to ultimately leave the institutional church and deliberately face

⁶⁴Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987. 42. Here Stoffer offers three basic convictions that formed the bias against any formal organization of the church: 1) no sect could avoid the divisive and controversial spirit that was a manifestation of the fall, 2) the very nature of outward practices is to lead to a formalism which destroys their essential inner meaning, and 3) formal organization must await a direct calling from God through His Spirit.

⁶⁵Ibid., 57.

⁶⁶I am using the term "Pietist" here as the more general classification under which both "Church Pietism" and "Radical Pietism" fall.

persecution.⁶⁷

However, the Early Brethren did not remain separate for long. The Early Brethren, probably under the influence of Arnold and Felbinger (a Mennonite church historian), whose influences emphasized the early church as a model, sensed the need to gather as a *Gemeinde*. While the Pietist influence emphasized the centrality of scripture, the Anabaptist influence emphasized the centrality of discipleship. Willoughby lists ten basic Anabaptist beliefs with which the Early Brethren agreed:

1. They were joining the True Church established by Jesus.
2. They deliberately organized their Gemeinde after the pattern and spirit of the New Testament, Apostolic Church.
3. They considered the New Testament as more relevant to their ethical and spiritual life than the Old Testament.
4. Christians must not go to law, take the oath, or become government officials.
5. There should be no force in religion.
6. Emphasis is on individual responsibility and freedom of the will, rather than on election or predestination.
7. The essence of Christian life is discipleship.
8. Secular authority should have no autonomy over religious organizations.
9. Christians do not resist, and hence do not go to war.
10. The "Ban" should be used against all who, having been baptized, yet stumble into sin. These, after admonition according to Matthew 18, if they do not repent, shall be excommunicated.⁶⁸

According to Stoffer, the Mennonites (Anabaptists) would have agreed with both the Lutheran and Reformed churches on most of their major theological points.⁶⁹ Likewise, the Pietist groups would also have theological similarities to both the Reformed and Lutheran churches. Stoffer delineates, however, that the differences between the Anabaptists and the Lutheran and Reformed churches stems more from emphasis than essence.⁷⁰ He specifies the differences as being most notably in the areas of ecclesiology and soteriology.⁷¹ Unlike the Pietists who individualized and spiritualized the effects of theology, the Anabaptists emphasized the praxis of the principles within the church. For them, faith was not merely an inward involvement separate

⁶⁷Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 41. Here Willoughby affirms this claim stating that prior to 1708, all the Schwarzenau Brethren were fundamentally Radical Pietists.

⁶⁸Ibid., 56.

⁶⁹Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987. 50.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

from the outside world; rather it was the living out of one's faith corporately. Another primary difference from the Pietists was the basic doctrine that since creation God would have a people for himself.⁷² Harold S. Bender quotes Max Göbel when explaining the emphasis of the Anabaptists:

The essential and distinguishing characteristic of this church is its great emphasis upon the actual personal conversion and regeneration of every Christian through the Holy Spirit . . . They aimed with special emphasis at carrying out and realizing the Christian doctrine and faith in the heart and life of every Christian in the whole Christian Church. Their aim was the bringing together of all the true believers out of the great degenerated national churches into a true Christian Church. That which the Reformation was originally intended to accomplish they aimed to bring into full immediate realization.⁷³

Unlike the Radical Pietists, who condemned the organized church and who emphasized a separatist individualistic spirituality, the Anabaptists sought to fulfil the original vision of Luther and Zwingli. In fact, Bender claims that the Anabaptists "retained the original vision, expanded it, gave it form, and set out to achieve it in actual experience."⁷⁴

In his concluding observations concerning Anabaptism, Stoffer gives three distinctive traits that set the Mennonites apart from the Brethren: first, was its existential character, i.e. their view of Christ as the example for new life; secondly, they relied upon the straightforward literal reading of scripture; thirdly, they appreciated the value that their outward actions could have toward witnessing to their faith.⁷⁵ As can be seen in each of these characteristics, the emphasis of pragmatic faith is an essential part. However, there were potential dangers within these characteristics as well. Stoffer acknowledges the potentials of legalism, factiousness, and narrowness.⁷⁶ Nonetheless these potential dangers were minute in comparison to the growth and expansion experienced by the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists can be understood as a fellowship of believers who live out their faith in practical ways. Consequently, the most obvious influence the Anabaptists had upon the Early Brethren community involved baptism. The Anabaptists recognized infant baptism as being illegitimate; therefore requiring members of their

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Harold S. Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, 37.

⁷⁴Ibid., 41.

⁷⁵Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 56.

⁷⁶Ibid.

community to be baptized as adults accompanied by confession of their faith. While this is the obvious point of agreement between the Anabaptists and the Early Brethren, it was also their strongest point of disagreement. Unlike the Anabaptists, the Early Brethren found no evidence in scripture for any mode of baptism other than immersion. Following their careful study of the scriptures, they determined that the believer should be baptized by trine immersion.⁷⁷

While living in the Palatinate, Mack and the other Early Brethren would have had substantial contact with the Anabaptists who were known as *Taufgesinnte* (Baptist minded).⁷⁸ In fact Early Brethren would be called the *Neu Taufers* in order to distinguish them from the Anabaptists. The need for distinction arose from their common belief in adult believers' baptism, yet differing essentially regarding the mode. Therefore one can begin to understand the initial identity of the Early Brethren as having developed out of the Radical Pietist movement while developing and adopting Anabaptist doctrines.⁷⁹ Thus the Early Brethren were specifically neither Pietist nor Anabaptist and yet both. However, it can be said, as according to the Early Brethren traditions, that these Brethren possessed the zeal and warmth of the Pietists and the commitment and discipleship of the Anabaptists.⁸⁰

⁷⁷This mode of baptism requires the believer to be immersed three times forward: once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son, and once in the name of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁸Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 45.

⁷⁹Eller, "On Epitomizing the Brethren," 47ff. In this article, Eller first describes the Brethren in terms of a dialectic. He says, "the epitome of the Brethren lies not in a monistic influence or orientation but precisely in the dialectical tension between the two orientations, Radical Pietism and Anabaptism." However, an interesting development within Brethren research consists of Willoughby [Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. This was originally his doctoral thesis for Boston University in 1950-51.] claiming that the Brethren completely rejected Radical Pietism and adopted Anabaptism, while the more recent research of Ensign [Chauncey David Ensign, "Radical German Pietism." (Boston: Boston University Doctoral Dissertation, 1955), 278-279.] contests this conclusion, suggesting that the doctrinal developments of the Early Brethren more likely are based in a combination of Radical Pietism and Reformed. Taking Ensign's lead, Stoffer [Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987.] more recently has further developed this idea more in a tridactic sense including the Reformed tradition in the formula as he followed the development of Brethren doctrines.

⁸⁰Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America. 41-45. The zeal of the Early Brethren can be attested to in their rapid growth while in Schwarzenau. Brumbaugh attests to their missionary spirit, which led to the founding of a second and third congregation in the region. Following the baptism of the first eight, he says, "And after all had come out of the water, and had changed their garments, they were also at the same time made to rejoice with great inward joyfulness, and by grace they were deeply impressed with these significant words, 'Be ye fruitful and multiply!'" In addition he notes that following this the group became strengthened in their faith and began to publicly testify to the truth. As a result of this the Early Brethren spread rapidly throughout the

A New Start in a New World

Following the establishment of their worshipping community, the Early Brethren experienced rapid growth. As a result of their zeal, these brethren planted a number of new congregations throughout Germany and even into Switzerland. Prince Heinrich supported a policy of religious tolerance within his region. However, as he grew older his brother-in-law, Count Carl Ludwig of Sayn, increasingly challenged his authority to rule. Thus the *Gemeinde* in Schwarzenau were experiencing great economic hardships and with the diminished influence and power of Prince Heinrich the Early Brethren decided to move to Friesland. They remained there for nine years before journeying to Pennsylvania to join their brothers and sisters from the Krefeld congregation who had already emigrated.⁸¹

When the Early Brethren decided to emigrate to America, they did so in two major and separate journeys: 1719 and 1729. It should be noted, however, that numerous other Brethren migrated to America in smaller groups, by family, or as individuals. Yet the majority of Brethren migrated as part of either of these two pilgrimages. The first emigration occurred as a result of a schism in the Krefeld congregation.⁸² The division was a result of a debate concerning whether a member could marry outside the membership. Consequently, a majority (it is said that some twenty families followed him) of the congregation began their journey westward led by Peter Becker. Tradition says that they left Friesland on a Flemish vessel, and upon arrival in the new world they settled in Germantown, Pennsylvania.⁸³

The second great migration occurred in 1729. Several years having past, the Brethren who settled in Germantown sent word to those dwelling in Friesland of a revival taking place in their community.⁸⁴ After moving to Friesland, the Brethren expected their situation to change.

Palatinate and beyond.

⁸¹Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 63.

⁸²For a full discussion of the Krefeld division see: Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995, 60-62. The Krefeld Schism was the result of a dispute between Johannes Naas and Christian Liebe. The dispute concerned a marriage of one of the members to someone outside the membership. Naas took the more lenient side whereas Liebe refused to let it occur. This controversy is said to have had such an impact upon the congregation that kept one hundred people convinced of trine baptism from being baptized.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., 66-67.

However, it did not and for many the situation only worsened. Some Brethren were impoverished to the extent that they were forced to accept charity from Dutch Collegiants in order to survive. Thus when they received the news from their brothers and sisters in Germantown, they were heartened and soon after a decision was made to join the group in America. However this decision was not unanimous and only about half of the Brethren in Friesland decided to make the journey.⁸⁵ This group of Early Brethren who made the trek was led by Alexander Mack in 1729. Upon their arrival in Philadelphia, they were met enthusiastically by the Brethren who had already settled in Germantown.

Prior to the second migration, the Germantown Brethren were experiencing growth and spiritual renewal. The most significant event for this new congregation occurred in 1723 as a result of revival.⁸⁶ Brumbaugh describes the momentous event:

Doubly memorable Christmas Day, 1723! Christ's anniversary and the date of the birth of His church in America! There is an activity at Peter Becker's house in Germantown. The spindles are still; and the voice of praise is raised. Six persons . . . all from what is now the Coventry district, were in the midst of seventeen members, and they were preparing to hold the first immersion in the church in America. There was no ordained minister this side of the Atlantic. The members hold a council. Peter Becker is chosen to act as elder. The preliminary examination is held, prayer is offered, and then these twenty-three souls walk single file, headed by Peter Becker. They journey to the Wissahickon Creek. The group kneels. Overhead the solemn sentinels of the forest fastness—the pines and hemlocks—are stilled. The ice-bound stream utters strangely solemn music. Curious eyes from the Kelpianites rest reverently upon the group. Peter Becker's voice breaks the stillness. The prayer is ended. The six candidates for membership in God's family are led one by one into the water and are baptized by trine immersion.⁸⁷

Following the baptism, the members of the party returned to one of the homes and celebrated Feet-washing, Love Feast, and Communion.⁸⁸ News of this event spread to all the Brethren in the region and even across the ocean. This event had such an effect upon the Brethren that their numbers rapidly increased.

⁸⁵William G. Willoughby, "The Life of Alexander Mack," The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1991), 5-6.

⁸⁶Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America. 155.

⁸⁷Ibid., 155-156.

⁸⁸Ibid.

Beisselian Controversy

However, with this growth came new struggles. Before Alexander Mack emigrated to America, the first major controversy for the Early Brethren in America was already brewing. This controversy surrounded an individual named Johann Conrad Beissel. Beissel was a Radical Pietist from the Palatinate. His father died at an early age and he was later left a complete orphan when his mother also died. He spent much of his early years travelling as a baker, until one day "falling under the sway of Pietists in Heidelberg."⁸⁹ According to Durnbaugh, due to Beissel's new faith he came into difficulties with the authorities who later expelled him from the region.⁹⁰ During his exile, Beissel came in contact with both the Inspired in the Marienborn area and the Brethren in Wittgenstein, but officially joined neither group. In 1720 he emigrated to America where he apprenticed himself to Peter Becker so that he could learn garment weaving. However, he soon moved from Germantown to the Conestoga region to join some friends at a hermitage.⁹¹ During his stay there he became reacquainted with Peter Becker who was on an evangelistic mission to the Conestoga region. Beissel witnessed some baptisms performed by his former master, thus creating for him a spiritual dilemma. After rationalizing a way in which to allow himself to be baptized by Becker, whom he thought inferior to himself, he was baptized by trine immersion thus becoming a member of the Brethren *Gemeinde*.⁹² Before leaving the Conestoga region, the Brethren spent considerable time schooling the new members as to "the organization and conduct of their church life."⁹³ As the new congregation organized, the members chose Conrad Beissel as their minister. It is at this juncture that the first great division of the church in America would occur.

In December, 1728, Beissel uninvitedly sent Michael Wolfahrt to the Germantown congregation denouncing Becker and proselytizing the congregation.⁹⁴ While no angry reply was made to Wolfahrt or Beissel, Becker suffered grievously. When Mack arrived in 1729,

⁸⁹Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 78.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., 79.

⁹⁴Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America. 198.

Becker humbly stepped aside allowing him to take the role of leadership in the Germantown congregation. Beissel refused to allow himself to be subordinate to the Elders of the Germantown congregation.

As the Ephrata community began to grow, so the differences between them and the Brethren did as well. The Conestoga congregation went well for a while until Beissel began preaching those teachings which were held by the Radical Pietists (especially those of Boehme). These doctrinal teachings included the necessity of celibacy for true Christians, and Sabbath observance instead of first day.⁹⁵ Stoffer adds that Beissel also taught direct revelation as being superior to Scripture.⁹⁶ Durnbaugh also identifies several distinctive differences: first is the Judaizing practices (Sabbath observance, certain foods banned, etc.); secondly was his insistence that the divine revelation he received took precedence over Scripture; thirdly was the emphasis placed upon celibacy as a virtue.⁹⁷ This in itself would not have been a problem had not so many Brethren been tempted by Beissel's preaching. In fact some of Mack's own family would later become members of the Ephrata community. This stands as further evidence that the Early Brethren were very much affected by a Pietistic perspective. In 1728 the actual break occurred when Beissel, unable to accept his subordination to Germantown, decided renounce the baptism he received by Becker, and was rebaptized by one of his own followers.⁹⁸

Expansion and Division

Following Alexander Mack's death in 1735, a new generation of leadership emerged within the Brethren *Gemeinde*. For the Brethren, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were

⁹⁵ Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: The Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe. 58. The fact that the Early Brethren community was split by the Pietistic teachings of Beissel demonstrates their own tendencies towards Radical Pietism. However, the end result of Alexander Mack denying the legitimacy of these teachings moved the *Gemeinde* away from their Radical Pietist brothers and sisters to a more Anabaptist obedience.

⁹⁶Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987. 87.

⁹⁷Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 88.

⁹⁸Ibid. A more thorough description of what later followed for the Ephrata community can be found in the following texts: E. G. Alderfer, The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counterculture. (Pittsburgh: 1985); Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America, 146-154, 179, 198-208; Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995, 89-102; Peter C. Erb, ed., Johann Conrad Beissel and the Ephrata Community: Mystical and Historical Texts. (Lewiston: 1985); Walter Klein, Johann Conrad Beissel: Mystic and Martinet. (Philadelphia: 1942).

periods of expansion. The Early Brethren began migrating westward and southward, with few exceptions. In the latter half of the eighteenth century the Brethren moved beyond the Susquehanna River into what is now western Pennsylvania.⁹⁹ With this expansion and growth came new challenges. These new challenges were not unfamiliar to the Early Brethren; they were only new in the sense of their experiences this side of the Atlantic. The American Revolution, for the Brethren, was a new trial and time of suffering they would have to endure. In this conflict they would attempt to remain neutral. Durnbaugh offers numerous reasons for their neutrality. However the foremost reasons were:

First, they were deeply religious people whose parents had risked migration to worship as they thought right. Their beliefs made them biblical nonresistants and forbade participation in warfare and bloodshed . . . they considered themselves to be a colony of heaven, strangers in an alien land, in the world but not of it . . . Moreover, they, along with the Friends, Mennonites, Amish, Schwenkfelders, and Moravians, owed a great debt of gratitude to the British government for their years of peace and prosperity in the New World.¹⁰⁰

The basis of their convictions was the scriptures from which they formed the praxis of their faith. Undoubtedly, there was a collection of scriptural passages that served as their proof-texts for their belief. The texts would have included the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels (Matt. 22, Mark 12, Luke 20), and the reflection of these teachings in the Pauline (Romans 13) and the Catholic Epistles (1 Peter 2). For the Early Brethren, scripture was not merely a doctrinal source, but essentially the rule for living. Therefore the Early Brethren were convinced that it was their duty to remain obedient to the scripture and thus loyal to their oath of allegiance to King George III. As a result of their commitment to remain neutral and nonresistant in war, they suffered many hardships. An example of the suffering is illustrated in Christopher Sauer's life. Having been a successful printer, he found himself unable to swear an oath to the colonial rebellion. Consequently the colonialists confiscated and sold all of his property, labelled him a traitor, subjugating him in other ways as well.¹⁰¹ This suffering was not limited to Elder Sower, but was shared by many others including other Anabaptist and Pietist groups.

Nevertheless, even with the unpopular peace stance during the American Revolution,

⁹⁹Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 191.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 148-149.

¹⁰¹Brumbaugh, A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America. 407-422. In his telling of Sower's experience, Brumbaugh includes a copy of a document penned by Sower telling of the account.

the Brethren *Gemeinde* not only survived, but continued to grow and expand. The expansion was such that by the early nineteenth century, the Brethren established a congregation west of the Mississippi River, in Missouri.¹⁰² Yet this continued growth and expansion was accompanied by troublesome diversity issues. Within the brotherhood¹⁰³ three divergent groups emerged. On the right side, favouring the primitive traditions was the Old Order Brethren; on the left were the Progressives pushing the Brethren to change; and in the middle were the Conservatives, preferring moderation. This diversity brought debated issues and these issues ranged from differences in ordinance practices to disputes over tolerance of congregational lifestyles.¹⁰⁴ During this time, schools of higher education (highschool grades and beyond) began to emerge led by Brethren. Some forty schools of higher education were founded, eight of which still exist. This new interest in higher education also became an issue for the traditionalists. By the mid-nineteenth century, diversity in polity became a central issue for the Brethren. Increasing unrest among congregations in the southwestern Ohio region came to the forefront in 1868. To begin with, the central concern of these congregations focussed on Annual Conference and the manner in which it was held. However, after being snubbed by the standing committee for Annual Conference, their concerns became more widespread to include issues of polity and ordinance. Specific concerns included the mode of "feetwashing."¹⁰⁵ At what point during the service feetwashing was performed also became an issue. In addition to this, these congregations were gravely concerned about issues of nonconformity. Some within the brotherhood slowly began conforming to the world. Finally in 1879, the group sent a petition through the District meeting that included the following issues: higher education, Sabbath school, revival meetings, paid ministry, and mode of feetwashing.¹⁰⁶ When the standing committee reworked the wording of their petition, toning it down from condemnation to a call for

¹⁰²Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 205ff.

¹⁰³This term is not used to be gender exclusive. Rather it is the self-identifying term used by the sisters and brothers who make up the Brethren.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 206-209. Durnbaugh discusses early divisions and conflicts among congregations, which resulted from the distance that grew between the congregations of the east and west. However, these were only the beginning of a greater conflict that would arise in 1879.

¹⁰⁵The term feetwashing is used in many of the Brethren writings to emphasize that both feet are washed in the ceremony.

¹⁰⁶Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 296.

moderation, the group met once again. After three days of meetings, they once again sent a petition with a few addendums to Annual Conference.¹⁰⁷ However this time they bypassed District conference setting up the standing committee to reject the petition on the grounds that it was not submitted according to procedure.¹⁰⁸ Following this rejection, the members of the concerned congregations voted to disfellowship any who would not join them. In other words they believed themselves to be the legitimate German Baptist Brethren Church.¹⁰⁹ On November 25, 1881, this small group of Brethren officially organized, taking the name "Old German Baptist Brethren" implying their maintenance of the primitive practices. It is generally acknowledged that this split was unavoidable due to the form and extent of the grievances.

While this split caused much bitterness within the brotherhood, they had not seen the end of conflict and division. In 1883, another division would occur causing equal resentment and bitterness. At the centre of this controversy was a man named Henry Holsinger. Holsinger was an outspoken man who partially owned a publishing company. Holsinger grew in stature in the church and began to openly criticize the church calling for reforms. According to Durnbaugh, Holsinger offered the following specific programme for church reform.

These measures included 1) training for ministers and other leaders at schools of higher education; 2) regular financial support for ministers; 3) Sunday schools for all age levels; 4) revival or "protracted" meetings; 5) evangelism through organized home missions and foreign missions; 6) reform in the method of holding Annual Meetings, including verbatim reports of its transactions; 7) relaxation of the strict and uniform dress code (garb), while avoiding extravagant fashion.¹¹⁰

In another article, Durnbaugh describes Holsinger as wanting to push the Brethren into reform using "polemics, satire, and personal critique in the pages of his papers."¹¹¹ It is widely acknowledged that Holsinger was abrasive with his approach. While the greater population of Brethren could not outrightly condemn the issues Holsinger raised in accordance with the Old

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 297.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 298.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 299. At the time this split occurred the Brethren referred to themselves as the German Baptist Brethren. They renamed themselves the Dunkard Brethren and then in 1908 and then finally in 1908 the Annual Conference accepted the title "Church of the Brethren."

¹¹⁰Ibid., 304.

¹¹¹Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Recent History," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1986), 26-27.

German Baptist Brethren, neither could they outrightly condone them. The large majority of Brethren preferred the way of moderation continuing to resist these changes even though they would ultimately accept all the reforms.

As a reaction to the previous division, many in the brotherhood "pressed for a stiffening of the authority of the Annual Meeting."¹¹² Holsinger criticized this authority and continued to publish articles concerning his criticisms of the church. Consequently, queries began arriving at Annual Meeting regarding their concerns about Holsinger and his criticism. Thus Annual Meeting sent a committee to Holsinger's church in Berlin, Pennsylvania. Because the meeting was at Holsinger's congregation, both parties were unable to come to agreement as to how the meeting would take place. Therefore the committee responded by recommending that Holsinger be disfellowshipped.¹¹³ A large group of progressive-minded Brethren assembled in Ashland, Ohio on June 29, 1882. At this assembly they began the steps of organizing a new body of Brethren. However, they waited until the following year to officially form as the Brethren Church in hopes that reconciliation would be sought by the conservative Brethren.¹¹⁴ Then in June 1883, the progressive Brethren formally gathered and proceeded toward officially organizing the Brethren Church. This gathering was the first General Convention of the Brethren Church held in Dayton, Ohio.¹¹⁵ With both divisions in the past, the central conservative party was then free to direct its energies toward the ministry of the church. Because of this new focus, the German Baptist Brethren Church experienced remarkable growth.

A New Century for the Brethren

Through all the turmoil that the nineteenth century brought, the German Baptist Brethren not only survived but experienced tremendous growth.¹¹⁶ A primary reason for this growth

¹¹²Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 308.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 313.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Sappington, The Brethren in Industrial America, 3. According to Sappington the most reliable statistics at the time show that in 1850 the Brethren membership was approximately 10,000. By 1920, and in spite of several divisions, the membership grew to 96,076.

concerns the focal change from inward to outward. Not long after the second division and into the twentieth century evangelists soon emerged from within the church. This conscious outreach coupled with the emergence of world missions opened the doors for new converts and new vigour. Durnbaugh describes how rapidly the world mission organization within the church grew.

Following 1884 the mission interests of the Brethren were reorganized and support increased. When this mission board began its work it had a sum of \$8.69 with which to work. By 1913 the annual receipts were over \$100,000 and the board's assets amounted to nearly \$1,000,000.¹¹⁷

With this new focus and accompanying growth, the church continued to change rapidly. By 1908, at the Annual Meeting, the conference voted to adopt the name, "Church of the Brethren (CoB)."¹¹⁸ As a result of this new focus, the Brethren were forced to begin rethinking their traditional beliefs, especially concerning nonconformity. In order for the Brethren to continue their outreach they would need to rework their traditional beliefs without letting go of them entirely. In his book, *Brethren Society*, Carl Bowman says that they transformed the traditional beliefs so that their ministry would be relevant in their contemporary world. Specifically he said that their emphasis on nonconformity was recast as the doctrine of the simple life, the nonresistance stance changed to the peace position.¹¹⁹ These changes amounted to much toward which Holsinger had pushed the church forty years earlier. By 1920, although the church was struggling with holding on to their traditional beliefs and with the attractiveness of the contemporary Protestant churches, the church accepted many of his proposed changes.¹²⁰

Issues of Modernity

It is at this juncture that the identity of the Brethren finds its relevance for this study. The following discussion will shape the hermeneutical colloquy, in which this thesis will engage in the subsequent chapters. While the twentieth century saw significant change and extensive growth, it also brought the CoB new challenges. The church began enduring theological struggles as

¹¹⁷Durnbaugh, "Recent History," *Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today*. 29.

¹¹⁸Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995*. 385.

¹¹⁹C. F. Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a Peculiar People*. (Baltimore: 1995), 340-381.

¹²⁰Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995*. 387.

they continued their journey into a modern society. Due especially to the emergence of higher education among the CoB, the *Gemeinde* was introduced to modern thought. Until the mid-nineteenth century the Brethren were primitivistic sectarians. With the growing interest in education and coupled with the schism with the Old German Baptist Brethren, the *Gemeinde* began directing its attention to the future and evangelism. This new focus toward the future was primarily the struggle of being in the world and not of the world. Thus as they entered the twentieth century they became more aware of modern thinking and the controversy it brought. Durnbaugh identifies three distinct strands that were in the forefront of the controversy: primitivism, liberalism, and fundamentalism.¹²¹ He explains primitivism as being the initial approach of the Brethren in which they believed themselves as the best model of the apostolic church. Before they officially organized they sought "reliable" histories of the early church along with the scriptures so that they could be sure to conform themselves to the early practices.¹²² This sense that the early church should be the primary model by which the true church was formed is the fundamental essence of primitivism. Durnbaugh rightly asserts that primitivism has been the most popular engine of radical reform throughout the ages.¹²³ This is well illustrated in the recent doctoral thesis by Kenneth J. Archer regarding the North American Pentecostal movement. In it he discusses the foundation of the movement as a means of the Christian Church returning to the apostolic model.¹²⁴ Regardless of the evolution of the CoB, signs of primitivism are still apparent even if only as a basis of doctrinal positions.

With the emergence of higher education among the Brethren came the influx of modernity within the educational process. As more and more Brethren sought education many became caught up in Protestant Liberalism.¹²⁵ Protestant Liberalism sought to save Christianity

¹²¹Ibid., 399.

¹²²Durnbaugh tells of the founding of the Early Brethren in Brethren Beginnings: The Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe, pg. 21, and the "reliable" church histories, which Alexander Mack Jr. (whom Durnbaugh quotes) refers to are those written by Gottfried Arnold.

¹²³Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 399.

¹²⁴Kenneth J. Archer, "Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century." (St. Andrews: Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, 2001), 129 ff.

¹²⁵Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 403.

from the threat of an exclusive fundamentalism.¹²⁶ Recent discoveries and modern inventions seemingly threatened the basis of Christian religion. Due much to the "Higher Criticism" and the emergence of Darwinian theory, science was elevated to the means of verifying biblical truth and historical objectivity became a universal goal. In his explanation of Liberalism in the context of the "three strands," Durnbaugh describes the significance of Liberalism as placing an emphasis upon the social gospel.¹²⁷ While this is an accurate explanation, it does not go to the heart of the controversy between Liberalism and Fundamentalism. In essence the central focus of this controversy was the Bible.¹²⁸ The modernists argued with rational argumentation backed by scientific verification especially questioning the supernatural events found in Biblical narratives. Because of the need for scientific verification, they believed that they had proven scripture to be neither infallible nor the word of God.¹²⁹ The nature of this rational and scientifically based argument resulted in a victory for Modernism in centres of higher education.¹³⁰ Noll offers Arthur Cushman McGiffert as an example of the "academic trajectory of much modernist thought."¹³¹ Further elaborating on McGiffert's example he says that three primary teachings were stressed: 1) the centrality of the life of Christ, 2) a commitment to scientific history, and 3) an allegiance to social ethics.¹³² From his own description of Liberalism, Durnbaugh lists five specific themes found therein:

- 1) Respect for science and scientific method; 2) acknowledgment that the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the ultimate reality is only tentative; 3)

¹²⁶Mark A. Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 383.

¹²⁷Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 403.

¹²⁸The focus on scriptural authority is illustrated in a series of extensive debate that took place between John Roach Straton, DD (Fundamentalist preacher) and Charles F. Potter, MA, STM (Liberal Unitarian minister). These debates received national press coverage and were broadcast live via radio. An edited transcript of the debates is found in Joel A. Carpenter, ed., Fundamentalist Versus Modernist: The Debates Between John Roach Straton and Charles Francis Potter. (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988).

¹²⁹Joel A. Carpenter, Fundamentalist Versus Modernist: The Debates Between John Roach Straton and Charles Francis Potter. (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), 62.

¹³⁰ Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada. 374.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

emphasis upon the principle of continuity, the close connection of the divine and the natural; 4) the essential similarity of all world religions; and 5) confidence in the future of humankind.¹³³

Thus as a result of the Modernist victory, scientific study began playing a central role in higher education. For the Brethren this would prove an increasing factor in their religious development. With the rapid increase of young people seeking an education, Brethren institutions became increasingly professionalized. By the turn of the century, currents in religious education began basing study upon comparative religion and historical growth and development.¹³⁴ However, even while embracing the liberal tenets, many Brethren resisted the characterization of being "Liberal." For them the scriptures clearly called them to minister to the needs of society. Daniel Webster Kurtz was a Brethren educator who exemplified the liberal mindset present in the Brethren community. Durnbaugh states that even with his liberal theological positions, Kurtz considered himself evangelical.¹³⁵

Responding to this seeming threat to the Christian faith, there emerged the fundamentalist movement.¹³⁶ This movement is defined as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism," by its foremost historian George Marsden.¹³⁷ This was an aggressive movement that sought to accomplish two goals: the first was "to prevent public schools and universities from teaching scientific theories which were deemed incompatible with traditional interpretations of the Bible; and second, as an effort to block the advance of liberal theology and modern scholarship in the churches."¹³⁸ Fundamentalism, like Liberalism, had a distinct effect upon the CoB. As Durnbaugh describes, several small churches left the brotherhood in the

¹³³Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 403.

¹³⁴Mark A. Noll, Between Faith and Criticism. (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 33.

¹³⁵Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, 405.

¹³⁶In Noll's A History of Christianity, the author notes that Curtis Law Lee, a Baptist editor, first defined "Fundamentalism" in 1920 as one who was ready "to do battle royal for the fundamentals." It was a protestation against the modernist interpretation of scripture, which sought to sanitize the Bible of myth (supernatural events).

¹³⁷George M. Marsden, Religion and American Culture. (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990).

¹³⁸Sidney A. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 909. To underscore the aggressiveness of Fundamentalism, Ahlstrom refers to it as "militancy." It could well be described as a "violent intellectual" protest against Protestant Liberalism.

wake of the controversy.¹³⁹

While the radical militancy of Fundamentalism may not have had a lasting effect upon the CoB, those holding to conservative doctrines were well represented in the person of Charles Calvert Ellis.¹⁴⁰ Ellis was a highly educated Brethren who served as president of Juniata College. He was outspoken concerning his conservative beliefs and was highly respected by Protestant Fundamentalists. However, Ellis refused the militant stance so characteristic of the Fundamentalist movement.¹⁴¹ And thus, as Durnbaugh states, "Ellis preferred to be known as an evangelical Christian."¹⁴² This illustrates how many Brethren, regardless of their conservative beliefs, avoided the dogmatic fundamentalism.

Though this is a historical description of the effect the Liberal--Fundamentalist controversy had upon the CoB, the following discussion will set out to suggest that the liberal theological tendencies that the CoB now has, stem more directly from this controversy than what has been described previously by scholars in previous studies. As the church continued to grow and reach out to the world, they embraced modernity, leaving behind the sectarian primitivism to become a modern church. However, even as the Brethren entered modernity they were faced with a choice between Liberalism or Fundamentalism.¹⁴³ These two choices

¹³⁹Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 408-409. Fundamentalists were a "tiny" minority within the CoB. Durnbaugh lists only one member of this minority by name, Harold Snider (1900-1993), who published a monthly periodical named *The Brethren Fundamentalist*. Snider, meeting stark opposition to his views, later attempted to take his congregation out of the CoB losing in a litigation suit with the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 409-412. Durnbaugh falls short of crediting Ellis' temperament as the integral reason that Fundamentalism did not affect the Church of the Brethren with the same violence that Protestantism experienced. Specifically he says, "Given a different temperament on the part of C.C. Ellis, the fundamentalist story for these decades could have been quite different."

¹⁴¹Ibid., 411. Durnbaugh records a letter by Ellis to Grant Mahan, Feb. 4, 1943, in which he says, "I must confess that though my doctrinal attitudes are far more in line with the fundamentalists, so-called, than by perhaps with any other group, I have been frequently disturbed in spirit at the intolerant attitude which certain ones of them seem to manifest; and I have taken occasion sometimes to suggest that important as it is to accept the doctrine of Christ, it is quite as important to manifest the spirit of Christ, for if one [does] not have this spirit, he is none of His."

¹⁴²Ibid., 410.

¹⁴³In her book, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), Nancy Murphy convincingly argues that both Liberalism and Fundamentalism are parts of Modernity, i.e. they are based upon the same philosophical foundations only shaped for each of their particular arguments. One can best illustrate this concept as Liberalism and Fundamentalism being two opposite points on the same

were based upon their embrace of modern philosophical thought.¹⁴⁴ While Durnbaugh states that they gravitated toward the Liberal end of the spectrum, he does not state why they did so. I would suggest that, as these young leaders entered the modern world, they saw both ends of the spectrum: one emphasizing social concerns, possessing an optimistic world-view, approaching scripture scientifically and rationally, and actively working toward church unification and world peace; the other a reactionary conservatism, which possessed the characteristics of militancy, exclusivity, and forced¹⁴⁵ dogma.¹⁴⁶ Even though for most Brethren scripture is of great importance, when faced with these two choices it becomes evident why the young Brethren leaders would gravitate toward Liberal Protestant thinking. As has been shown previously, a primary core value, which makes up Brethren identity, is the idea of "no force in religion." Therefore as the Brethren were faced with the perspective of Fundamentalism, the militancy they observed repulsed them. However, for many Brethren the optimism and emphasis of social concerns by Liberalism was attractive.

Underlying the above issues, there is a philosophical conundrum of sorts. While admittedly it may not have been of concern for these Brethren, it has had lasting effects upon the CoB fellowship. Previously the central role which scripture played in the development of the

spectrum (Modernity being that spectrum).

¹⁴⁴Durnbaugh demonstrates the Brethren, especially their educational institutions, as having adopted modern methods of teaching. This would include the emphasis of science. Admittedly, Durnbaugh does not intend to demonstrate this; however, he inadvertently does so while accounting for the emergence of institutions of higher education and their influence upon the greater population of the Brethren. Furthermore, he states explicitly, "As younger Brethren leaders went on to graduate school to secure advanced training, they gravitated to the centres of liberal Protestant thought." Yet some Brethren also made their way to the Fundamentalist schools as well. The statement that the CoB took on the identity of a modern church in as much as they embraced modern philosophical thinking is based upon these accounts. Fruit of the Vine. 403-412.

¹⁴⁵The purpose for the term "forced" is to express the requirement of members of the Fundamentalist community to affirm a series of beliefs. The crux of the matter was the Brethren conviction of noncredalism. Brethren were averse to any dogmatic affirmation of human-made doctrines. For Brethren the New Testament is the rule of faith and practice. Admittedly, Fundamentalism did not exercise force to the extent of physical violence as was experienced by the Early Brethren. However, due to the experienced persecution by their predecessors, they were sensitive to and resistant to any form of force in religion.

¹⁴⁶See, Marsden, Religion and American Culture, Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995, Murphy, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda, Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada, and González, The Story of Christianity, vol. 2.

Brethren *Gemeinde* has been demonstrated. However, as they entered the modern world, the validity of the scripture upon which their faith was based was challenged. Yet even as members of other Protestant denominations aggressively contested Liberalism's challenge, the Brethren still resisted fundamental language and affirmation of such doctrines as inerrancy.¹⁴⁷ Murphy argues that the epistemological basis of faith was bifurcated between "Experience and Scripture."¹⁴⁸ For Liberals, experience was the validation of knowledge, especially in terms of scientific analysis. Yet Fundamentalism bases the validation of knowledge upon scripture. Specifically concerning Liberalism, many Brethren found the points of Liberalism quite attractive, because the very basis of their faith was praxis oriented. Thus it was easy for human experience to serve as their epistemological basis.¹⁴⁹ This emphasis of human experience created an openness to Liberal theology. However there was by no means a universal conformity among the Brethren concerning these issues. As can be seen by the variety of educational and church leaders and their positions the Church of the Brethren remained a diverse community.¹⁵⁰ In fact, in the 193rd Annual Conference report, specifically regarding scriptural authority, the committee records the following:

From an examination of various documents and statements in the Gospel Messenger of those years [around the turn of the twentieth century], it is possible to find Brethren with leanings toward both sides of the debate. The extremes, however, one does not find.¹⁵¹

Inasmuch as the Modernist controversy of the early twentieth century affected the Brethren

¹⁴⁷While Brethren resisted the term "inerrancy" when describing scripture, they did use the term "infallible" during the early part of the twentieth century. Durnbaugh provides two examples of published statements: "1) H. B. Brumbaugh wrote in 1914: We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament have their authority from God and were written by divinely-inspired men and that they are a perfect, infallible, and sufficient standard of faith . . ." the second example he provides is found in a statement called *The Message of the Brethren Ministry* written in 1921. In it the scripture are described as "the infallible record . . ." Durnbaugh, "Brethren and the Authority of the Scriptures," BLT. XIII: 3: Summer: 1968, 171-183.

¹⁴⁸Murphy, Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda. This argument is made in the first chapter of her book. In essence she suggests that for Liberalism the epistemological validation of knowledge came from human experience, while for Fundamentalists it came from scripture.

¹⁴⁹Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: a History of the Brethren 1705-1995. 403ff.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 399-412.

¹⁵¹193rd Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Minutes. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1979), 558. The parenthetical explanation is mine.

Gemeinde, and inasmuch as the educational leaders gravitated one way or another, they avoided being caught up in the full force of the controversy. Ranier W. Burkart states that Brethren historical research "assumed a leading position in the attempt to show the way to a theological identity, an identity that would not let itself be appropriated by the streams of American theology."¹⁵² This, he argues, was accomplished through historical research. It is his assessment that through historical research Brethren revisited their origins thus solidifying their identity apart from mainline Protestantism, thus avoiding both liberalism and fundamentalism.

As has been shown in the previous arguments, the CoB has evolved from its primitivistic belief that they must remain separate from the world in order to minister to the world through missions. Upon entering the modern world, they were faced with the Liberalism and Fundamentalism debate and while many tended toward Liberalism, there remained diversity within the *Gemeinde* regarding the issues. Even with all the changes that took place in the brotherhood, praxis remained the central focal point. From the founding of the German Baptist Brethren, faith was always a matter of obeying the commands of Jesus.¹⁵³ The CoB is a praxis oriented fellowship whose interpretation of scripture is application.¹⁵⁴

In the following decades, the Brethren identity would continue to develop as new movements and ministries began. As the United States government entered into the First World War, the Brethren were faced with another challenge to their nonresistance convictions. Also during these years as the CoB engaged the world, modernistic individualism began affecting the development of the *Gemeinde*. It is during these years, as will be discussed later in this thesis, that the conviction of nonresistance was redefined as the peace witness and other significant developments take place.

¹⁵²Ranier W. Burkart, "History of Research on the Church of the Brethren From the Eighteenth Century to the Present," *BLT*. 45:1,2: 2000, 68.

¹⁵³In his article "Beliefs," *Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today*, Stoffer says, "The Brethren have ever been a people of the *Word* who sought to translate that *Word* into life (43)."

¹⁵⁴The basis of this statement is illustrated in the 1979 standing committee report to annual conference where on pg. 563 it is observed that the only area of absolute agreement concerning scripture is found in the affirmation of faithful response to the Biblical message. All other points of the report include notes of disagreement for each statement.

The Present Dynamic

"The Brethren have never been much interested in theologizing."¹⁵⁵ In addition Eller says, "Pretty much as a matter of course they have accepted the general doctrinal stand of orthodox, evangelical Protestantism, but within those limits they have allowed considerable flexibility and divergency."¹⁵⁶ Inasmuch as Eller makes this claim, the diversity that exists within the brotherhood is understandable. While uniformity of beliefs is preferred, it most importantly gives way to unity within the *Gemeinde*. Today the brotherhood is a diverse body of thought and belief. In their report to the 1979 annual conference, the standing committee presented the conference with eight statements of affirmation regarding scriptural inspiration and authority. The tone of this report is one that openly seeks uniformity, but clearly acknowledges the diversity of opinion that exists in the *Gemeinde*. As was stated in the previous discussion concerning the Fundamentalism/Liberalism controversy that occurred around the turn of the twentieth century, the issue that still underlies the debate is that of scriptural authority.

This is of particular interest to this study because of the scriptural focus. While Eller stated that the Brethren may accept orthodox theological views, he also qualifies this statement by emphasizing the diverse understandings of orthodoxy. This is important because how one approaches and interprets scripture is determined by one's understanding of scriptural authority. While particular doctrinal affirmations were made, problems of definition arose within these affirmations.¹⁵⁷ Regardless of the dispute concerning definitions, the overall report affirms the authority and significance of scripture and ultimately challenges the denomination to a more thorough Biblical awareness. The report encourages the sisters and brothers to embrace their diversity and share in mutual love. The end of the report includes a brief essay which outlines steps to be taken to ensure the unity of the body.

After conducting extensive studies concerning the CoB, sociologist Carl F. Bowman

¹⁵⁵Vernard Eller, "Beliefs," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present. (Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1974), 39.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷In the 1979 annual conference minutes (561-563), eight points of affirmation are offered concerning scriptural authority and inspiration (for a full listing of these affirmations, see Appendix A). An example of the problem of definition can be observed in seven of the eight points. The first term with conflicting definitions is *inspiration*. The committee was unable to come to consensus as to whether *inspiration* is a finished act by God or if it continues. Each subsequent point had similar disputes except for the eighth point which as noted above had unanimous agreement.

says, regarding the CoB's identity, "One thing is certain: the Church of the Brethren is less clearly defined today than it was 100 years ago."¹⁵⁸ He goes on to add that "there is so much variation among the modern Brethren that it is difficult to think of them in any sharply defined manner."¹⁵⁹ The source of this ambiguity within the Brethren is the Modernity's individualism, which in effect feeds off the Brethren's Pietist roots. Yet the demarcation is not so blurred as to lose the Brethren's distinct marks of Anabaptist and Pietistic origins.

Summary

This chapter set out to offer a brief historiography for the Church of the Brethren and from it to sketch a historical narrative from its formation to the present. Following the survey of literature, I demonstrated that the CoB was a movement which developed as an extreme wing of the Reformation. Thus it was a protest against both Catholicism and Protestantism. Specifically, the *Gemeinde* emerged from Radical Pietism and while leaving behind the Radical Pietists they embraced an Anabaptist ecclesiology. It is from the convergence of Radical Pietism and Anabaptism that the Early Brethren identity was formed. Thus both contribute to the make up of the Brethren identity.

Having left the established churches and dwelling among the Radical Pietists, the Early Brethren found it necessary for their faith to live in a community consisting of sisters and brothers participating in fellowship and accountability. Therefore, they deliberately formed an organized fellowship. Following the formation of their fellowship, their *Gemeinde* expanded throughout Germany. However, due to their growth they soon faced persecution and suppression from the established churches.

In the midst of persecution and repression, it was shown that the Brethren emigrated to Germantown, Pennsylvania where they began to grow and expand. Yet as we have seen this rapid growth was accompanied by division and controversy. Nevertheless, overshadowing the divisions and controversy was the development of world missions and higher education. World missions changed the focus of Brethren from being inward and separatist to outward and outreaching. With higher education came the Brethren's immersion in modernity. Although neither extreme of the Fundamentalism/Liberalism controversy could be found in the CoB, the

¹⁵⁸Carl F. Bowman, "Brethren Today," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today. 222.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

effects were considerable. Finally in the process of development, the CoB became diverse in its beliefs and thoughts. The most significant conclusion of this chapter is that the changes which the *Gemeinde* experienced were results of both modernity's influences upon them and the emotional effects the divisions left on the fellowship.

As this thesis is primarily concerned about the hermeneutical perspective of the CoB and how it affects their interpretation of scripture, this historical narrative concerning the CoB raises three particular questions. First, if we are to understand the present hermeneutical perspective of the CoB, we must first offer an explanation of the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren. Second, this chapter has raised a significant question as to the relationship of Radical Pietism and Anabaptism in forming the identity of the Brethren. Is it essentially Radical Pietist with similarities to Anabaptism? Or did the Early Brethren completely leave Radical Pietism behind and embrace Anabaptism? Perhaps it is a dialectic tension as Eller argues or maybe something else. Thirdly, how did the Early Brethren interpret scripture? Even as this chapter has raised these questions, in chapter two I will set out to provide answers to each.

CHAPTER TWO

Early Brethren Hermeneutical Perspective

“So then, if some more brethren wish to begin this high act of baptism with us out of brotherly unity according to the teachings of Christ and the apostles, we announce in humbleness that we are interceding together in prayer and fasting with God.”¹⁶⁰ -Alexander Mack

Introduction

The previous chapter set out to provide a basic sketch as to who the Church of the Brethren are including a brief description of their tradition. While chapter one provided an outline of their identity, chapter two will focus particularly upon the Early Brethren. The purpose for this chapter is to define the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren, which I will argue has been affected essentially by both Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. Therefore, this chapter will define and describe Radical Pietism and Anabaptism and their contribution to the Brethren identity. Special attention will be given to Vernard Eller’s argument that the Brethren identity is a dialectic tension between Pietism and Anabaptism. I will argue that it is not necessary to describe the Brethren identity as a dialectic tension, nor is it appropriate to describe them as Anabaptist over against Pietist and vice versa. Finally, in this chapter I will describe the Early Brethren Bible reading method that extends out of their identity.

Hermeneutical Perspective Explained

Before this chapter can adequately answer the question, “What is the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective?”, we must first specify what is meant by “hermeneutical perspective.” The phrase is made up of two distinct and significant terms which connote context and identity. The first term, “hermeneutical,” denotes both the act of interpretation and that which affect one’s interpretation. The term “hermeneutic(al)” has been described as referring to the principles people use to understand or interpret communicative messages regardless of

¹⁶⁰Alexander Mack, “The First Brethren Tract,” The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1991), 9.

form.¹⁶¹

The second term in the above phrase is "perspective." While "hermeneutical" refers primarily to the means of understanding, "perspective" refers to all contextual experience which affects the process of understanding. It can be understood as synonymous with "point-of-view," as the Oxford Concise English Dictionary defines it as "a position from which a thing is viewed," or "a particular way of considering a matter."¹⁶² A "perspective" or "point-of-view" consists of the values, presuppositions, and biases held by the relevant individual or community.

When used in tandem, as is the case for this chapter, "hermeneutical perspective" denotes not only the means by which an individual or community comes to understand something, but also openly acknowledges the multifaceted context of that individual or community. In addition to the external factors which affect the community's perception, more significantly internal factors exist within the community that form the core of identity and create a metaphorical lens through which the community perceives. In the context of the Early Brethren, these internal factors are the core convictions that extend from their unique narrative.¹⁶³ Therefore, this chapter will set out to establish both the means by which the Early Brethren interpreted scripture, and the perspective or point-of-view that contributes to the creation of meaning¹⁶⁴ in the interpretive process. While establishing methodology is somewhat less

¹⁶¹William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Introduction to Biblical Interpretation. (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1991), 4.

¹⁶²H. W. Fowler, F. G. Fowler, and Della Thompson, editors, Oxford Concise English Dictionary. Ninth edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1055.

¹⁶³In his thesis, "Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century." (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews Dissertation, 2001), Kenneth J. Archer argues that there are "central narrative convictions" within a community which explain "why the community exists," who the community is, and "how they fit into the larger scheme of Christian history." Archer's argument is an expansion of Douglas Jacobson's work "Pentecostal Hermeneutics in Comparative Hermeneutical Perspective." Jacobson's work lays the foundation for acknowledging the significance of hermeneutical communities and that each of these communities possess a distinctive identity which shapes the particular perspective by which they read scripture. It has been only recently that Pentecostalism has begun discussing or at least acknowledging the community as a hermeneutical lens through which perception (particularly the scriptures) is negotiated. In much the same manner I will argue that the core convictions of the Early Brethren are the hermeneutical lens through which they read scripture. In addition these convictions are in essence central narrative convictions in that they emerge out of the narratives of Early Brethren faith experience.

¹⁶⁴This concept of "creating meaning" requires further explanation. While not accepting the extreme conclusion of Stephen Fowler's argument in Engaging Scripture (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), which argues that a text has no meaning or that it is "underdetermined," this thesis will assert

difficult, establishing the point-of-view or perspective of any given community can be more challenging. As formerly defined, the perspective consists of values, presuppositions and biases held by an individual or community.¹⁶⁵ Thus, the goal of this exercise is to identify a number of convictional statements (central narrative convictions) which express the perspective of the Early Brethren community.

Pietist

Concerning the perspective or point-of-view that affects the means of interpretation, there are two primary controlling factors that form the foundation of the Early Brethren identity: Pietism and Anabaptism.¹⁶⁶ It is against these two backdrops that Early Brethren must be understood. As was shown in the previous chapter, the Early Brethren movement developed immediately out of Radical Pietism. While both Pietism and Radical Pietism share some of the same characteristics, through the years historians have found it necessary to distinguish between the two. Pietism is the initial movement from which Radical Pietism developed. Therefore a brief discussion and description of Pietism and Radical Pietism is necessary. This section will propose that there are several primary characteristics that make up the perspective of the Radical Pietists which significantly affected the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective.

Pietism

that a text is a pool of potential meaning. Admittedly, the term "meaning" offers ambiguity in formal discussions. However, Kenneth J. Archer argues in his thesis, "Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century," that meaning is a byproduct of a "tridactic" interrelationship which occurs as a person in community being led by the Spirit engages the text of scripture.

¹⁶⁵Perhaps it is best to acknowledge that no one exists apart from community. Regardless of circumstances, individuals experience some sort of cultural community, thus making them parts of community and hermeneuts whose perception is shaped by the community.

¹⁶⁶While this study focuses upon the two primary sources of identity, from which the Brethren come, namely, Anabaptism and Pietism, it is necessary to also recognize that some scholars include the Reformed tradition in their formula. This is based upon the fact that six of the first eight Brethren left the Reformed church with the Radical Pietist movement. Thus both Dale Stoffer and Donald Durnbaugh include the Reformed tradition as playing a central role in the forming of the Brethren identity. It is not the intention of this study to ignore the Reformed influence. This study presupposes that the Early Brethren predominantly moved out of the Reformed tradition into Pietism, then into Radical Pietism, and finally formed a new *Gemeinde*. The minimal noting of Reformed influence is due to the radical protestation of the Reformed tradition. However it is also presupposed that the Brethren share many basic theological understandings due simply to the origin of the Early Brethren.

Pietism is a complex movement which is extremely difficult if not impossible to narrowly define. Historians have described it as having many branches often reflecting the teachings of particular leaders, such as Arndt, Spener, Francke, etc. Because Church Pietism merely serves as a backdrop for Radical Pietism, it is, thus, not central to the argument of this thesis. Therefore, I will offer only a summary of the aspects of Pietism that essentially affected the development of Radical Pietism and ultimately the Early Brethren. This by no means attempts to comprehensively describe Pietism.

I have already (in chapter 1) described Pietism¹⁶⁷ as a "religious revival, reacting to the emotional sterility of the government sponsored and supported churches."¹⁶⁸ This is a limited description that expresses more the motivation and cause of Pietism than it provides a description of the movement. In essence Pietism is a renewal movement that began within Protestantism beginning in the 17th century. It sought individual religious renewal which would extend to the renewal of church and society while emphasizing the importance of religious fellowship. Reflecting much of Francke's thought, Pietists believed that Christians must grow in faith, wisdom, good works, and must separate themselves from the "world."¹⁶⁹ In addition they worked toward establishing a biblical perspective for both a religious and ethical life. This means that they not only studied the scripture but endlessly sought to practice its principles in daily living. Pietists believed that the authentic Christian life was characterized by active ethical living. They sought complete dedication and investment of one's energies toward Christian living. This was characterized by self-examination, (daily) repentance, prayer, hearing or reading scripture, and taking part in the sacrament.¹⁷⁰ Even as the Reformers held to this same idea, the Pietists sought to live uncompromisingly and consistently according to the principles of scripture (particularly the New Testament). They strove for a distinctive lifestyle which in itself

¹⁶⁷The form of Pietism primarily relevant to this study is German Pietism. It is necessary to clarify this point due to the multifaceted nature of Pietism. Admittedly, Pietism was not limited to the European Continent, but also arose in Great Britain and North America.

¹⁶⁸William G. Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1999), 27.

¹⁶⁹F. Ernest Stoeffler, German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 18. Stoeffler also points out five themes that Francke continually emphasized and which Pietists also continued: trials, cross-bearing, obedience to God's law, trust in God, and joy (19). Each of these continually resurface in Francke's sermons.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 21.

was a criticism of the religious and ethical standards held by the established churches.

Traditionally Pietism has been described through the writings of its founders, such as Spener, Arndt, Francke, etc. From these we are able to discern particular emphases and convictions which characterize Pietism. Ensign cites six suggestions for church renewal that are rooted in Spener's works.¹⁷¹ These suggestions emphasize three specific ideas that epitomize Pietist thinking: the ability and necessity of the laity to study scripture, the importance of ethical living by all believers, the increased value of all believers as is expressed in "priesthood of all believers" and the focus upon laity participation regarding religious activity particularly the use of common language in all theological discussions.

In addition to these characteristics Drummond offers further observations. He characterizes the Pietists by their 1) eager desire to preach a simple religion of the heart, 2) expression of immediate feelings rather than reflective study, 3) an emphasis on the second birth, 4) the fellowship created by all those who share this experience, 5) a distinction between the quality of life of the converted and those of the world, 6) devotional reading of the Bible, 7) spiritual intelligence,¹⁷² 8) priesthood of all believers, 9) discipleship is not about accepting dogma but a call to holiness, philanthropy, and evangelism.¹⁷³ These observations recognize two additional emphases present in Pietism: the experiential nature of faith, especially in the expression of emotional response to scripture and devotion, and the second birth. Therefore from these descriptions of Pietism we come to a general understanding of its nature.

While Pietism certainly had positive effects upon Christian faith it also has been criticized as going to extremes. Dale Brown, says that Pietism "has contributed to hypocritical legalism, experiential fanaticism, narrow-minded dogmatism, and loveless separatism."¹⁷⁴ Radical Pietists used some of these same criticisms against the Anabaptists. However, unlike Anabaptism,

¹⁷¹See Chauncey David Ensign, Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760). (Boston University Dissertation, 1955), 84.

¹⁷²Andrew Landale Drummond, German Protestantism Since Luther. (London: Epworth Press, 1951), 56. What Drummond means by "spiritual intelligence" is the intellectual understanding of what one professes through prayer and devotion. In his text, Drummond expresses this through a comparison between what he calls the spiritually intelligent and those who are spiritually ignorant by saying "even in the Reformed Palatinate the ignorant prayed 'deliver us from the Kingdom' and in the Creed declared that Christ was 'ponified under Pilate.'"

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Dale Brown, Understanding Pietism. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 151.

Pietism sought not to form a new church but to renew the existing one. Pietists were inclined to complete the work started by the reformers.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, Church Pietism would need no specific theology apart from that of the church to which they belonged, because according to some substantial leaders in the movement (Spener being one), the goal was to remain in the church and work to bring renewal from the inside.

The focus of experience and emotions within the context of biblical devotion is of particular importance regarding the Early Brethren. In the fellowship of the Early Brethren we find this sense of zeal or religious fervour accompanied by a discerned conviction following scriptural study. Having intensely studied scripture as a group, and following much prayer and devotion, the group of sisters and brothers felt convicted to obey the scripture.¹⁷⁶ They became convinced to the extent of risking persecution for the need to be baptized.

Stoffer's study recognizes four basic components that most scholars agree upon regarding Pietism: "(1) the new birth, (2) the new life, (3) emphasis on the Bible, (4) an optimistic call for reform."¹⁷⁷ The Pietist emphasis on "new birth" refers to both Francke's and Spener's conviction that all Christians are called to a radical change of life. For both Francke and Spener this "radical change" is not a once and for all transformation.¹⁷⁸ Instead it is a lifelong process of change. Stoffer says, "The new birth effects a new state of being in the believer in which he is united with Christ in a psychological and volitional union."¹⁷⁹ This underscores the human role in this life changing event as being a response of faith. Pietists emphasized the new birth as the event in which God not only pardons the sin of the believer but also begins the process of transforming the life of the sinner. There is a definite dualistic understanding in Pietism which contrasts the power of God with the power of sin.¹⁸⁰

A direct outgrowth of a "new birth" is the "new life." This component of Pietism is based upon their idea that sanctification is a transformation of character, which is a joint working of

¹⁷⁵Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735, 30.

¹⁷⁶Mack, "The First Brethren Tract," The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack, 9-14. In his first tract, Mack explains the origins of the Early Brethren convictions.

¹⁷⁷Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 15.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 16.

¹⁷⁹Ibid. See also Stoeffler, German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century, 17-18.

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

both God and the individual. More pointedly to Stoffer's explanation, God initiates the process and provides the strength and power necessary to accomplish it.¹⁸¹

The source, however, for their convictions is found in the centrality of scripture. Pietists held scripture as their source of life and growth. Yet this is not the most significant aspect of this pietistic component. Pietists continued the Reformation in biblical interpretation. They sought to complete what the reformers started by seeking to "free the scripture from formalistic methods of interpretation."¹⁸² For orthodoxy, the controlling factor with biblical interpretation was the creeds. Pietism sought to break the cords of the creeds freeing biblical interpretation. Both Spener and Francke assert that Scripture must be its own interpreter. "The meaning of a passage must be considered in its broader context, while difficult passages should be interpreted by those which are clear."¹⁸³ Stoffer points out that this was important so that the common person could become familiar with the "simple message" of scripture and order their lives accordingly.¹⁸⁴ Finally, Pietism was rooted in the German Reformation and thus possessed an optimistic sense that change within the church could occur. It was their belief that the Reformation was not finished and that more had to be accomplished.

Radical Pietism

While many Pietists met in their conventicles opting to remain in the established church, some became increasingly disconcerted with the deadness in the established church and decided to separate (thus, the term "separatists") from the church. Thus it became necessary for historians to distinguish between the "moderate" Pietists, who opted to remain in the established church, and the more "radical" Pietists who left. Stoffer identifies the radical movement as "a branch of the Pietist movement which expressed its piety through channels which were mystical, spiritualistic, Boehmist, and separatistic."¹⁸⁵

In Ensign's notable work regarding Radical Pietism, he distinguishes fourteen distinctive

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²Ibid., 17.

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 19.

doctrinal beliefs that were generally held by the broad categorization of Radical Pietism. The first doctrinal belief listed is (1) *Trinitarianism*. This, according to Ensign, was only loosely held by Radical Pietists.¹⁸⁶ Boehme, who is one of the primary sources of Radical Pietist doctrinal beliefs, sought to avoid speaking of God as three persons. "For him, this one, divine *Wesen* has revealed Himself in three forms in the process of creation."¹⁸⁷ Radical Pietists saw trinitarian formulations as the decline of the early church.¹⁸⁸ Because of their aversion to trinitarian terminology, Radical Pietists appear to have been modalistic in their understanding of God. The second doctrinal belief which Ensign distinguishes is (2) *Christology*. According to Ensign, some Boehmists developed a Christology which suggested that Christ was "conceived by the heavenly *Sophia*, and that he was born spiritually androgynous."¹⁸⁹ Radical Pietists also developed distinctive (3) *doctrinal beliefs concerning marriage*. While early on they elevated celibacy yet considered marriage as carnal, the Radical Pietist eventually came to accept Hochmann's five point doctrine concerning marriage. This doctrine consisted of the following five levels:

- 1) The completely beastly. This occurs when men take wives like dumb beasts, purely from the sexual-motive . . .
- 2) The honorable and moral, but heathenish. All legal requirements are observed, but the marriage is heathenish because the partners do not stand in covenant with God, and the marriage is entered into out of worldly considerations . . .
- 3) The Christian. Such a marriage takes place when two who are made holy through the blood of Jesus unite in married love, with the love of Christ, who loved the *Gemeine* and gave Himself for her . . .
- 4) The fourth, and more advanced grade is the *Jungfräuliche*, when two who are consecrated to God and the Lamb unite for no other purpose than to help each other to a fuller holiness by uniting their prayers, and also helping in physical need . . .
- 5) That of a soul married to the Lamb. Such a one, who has had Christ for "*Mann*," or "*Braut*," will attain the highest degree of glory in the Kingdom of Christ, and will sit on the right hand of the Messiah.¹⁹⁰

This doctrinal belief sheds light on why some of the Early Brethren left the Germantown *Gemeinde* to join the Ephrata community which strongly held this doctrine. The Radical Pietist influence upon the Early Brethren was a real presence in the minds of the brothers and sisters.

¹⁸⁶Ensign, Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760). 407.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 174-176.

Even Alexander Mack Jr. spent some time in the Ephrata community.

Radical Pietism also reflected a (4) *nature mysticism*.¹⁹¹ According to Ensign, Boehme was considered a nature mystic because of his openness to alchemy, astronomy, and magic.¹⁹²

More specifically he is considered this because:

. . . for him the universe is regarded as a total organism, of which man is the *microcosm* – the epitome – or concentration of the universe; the universe, or *macrocosm*, is an extension and development of that which exists in man in a state of concentrated unity.¹⁹³

Due to their openness and their understanding that God wills certain knowledge within his people, Radical Pietists were open to revelation concerning natural secrets. This is illustrated in that some, as Boehme also did, began dispensing medicine.¹⁹⁴

Another doctrinal belief, which Radical Pietists affirmed, was (5) *Quietism*. Quietism is the mystical belief that one should wait upon God. Ensign says, "Quietism, from the turn of the eighteenth century onward, was to become, next to Boehmism, the greatest single influence in radical Pietism."¹⁹⁵ While Quietism quieted the ecstatic outward experiences of Radical Pietism, it also turned their focus inward adding a new mystical characteristic. In addition to Quietism, the Radical Pietists possessed a (6) *mystical theology*. By mystical theology, Ensign explains, "The pedagogical and social emphases in Pietism tended to force all forms of mysticism into one mold, denominated 'mystical theology.'"¹⁹⁶ This denominated "mystical theology" was divided into three stages of mystical experiences: purification, enlightenment, and union.¹⁹⁷ The

¹⁹¹Ensign labels this doctrinal belief, "Sophia-mysticism and natural secrets" (409). This is based upon Boehme's claim that Sophia revealed divine secrets about nature to him.

¹⁹²Ibid., 37.

¹⁹³Hans L. Martensen and Stephen Hobhouse, Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). Studies in his Life and Teachings. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 24. As cited in Ensign, Radical German Pietism, 36.

¹⁹⁴Ensign, Radical German Pietism, 409.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 230-231.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 410.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

highest elevation, of course, was union with God.¹⁹⁸

The next doctrinal belief for Radical Pietism concerned the (7) *Bible and inspiration*. According to Ensign, Radical Pietists often interpreted scripture allegorically. Moreover, he says that they would regularly “attach mystic significance to commonplace statements.”¹⁹⁹ As a consequence of this mystical emphasis, they believed that revelation was a current occurrence. This led to the belief that they too could be “inspired.”²⁰⁰ These new revelations from the Spirit were always secondary and were to supplement and agree with scripture. This would have been an empowering experience for an oppressed community. Now they could possess a greater influence in their communities. Ensign asserts that they would claim that secrets were “revealed to them in visions, dreams, and meditations.”²⁰¹ Thus Radical Pietists had an openness to new revelation.

Additionally Radical Pietists held to the doctrinal belief of (8) *Salvation of the Heathen*. This was the understanding that the heathen have the inner word in their hearts and thus may be saved if they obey it. This means that they believed salvation could be obtained apart from the historic Christian revelation.²⁰² It asserts that God reveals himself to all people through the inner light. Therefore anyone may be saved if they follow that inner light. Regarding (9) *salvation and sanctification*, Ensign says “Boehme shared the Lutheran teaching that salvation was by grace through faith.”²⁰³ But unlike Luther, Boehme and the Radical Pietists rejected any form of imputation theory. For the Radical Pietists, one must repent from sin before God can forgive it.²⁰⁴ Salvation was not a punctiliar event. Rather, for the Radical Pietists it was a process in which Christ takes shape within the individual. However, much like the moderate

¹⁹⁸This stage is described in such a way as to sound monistic in essence. However, the understanding of this union with God is more attuned to the same sense found among Pietists who, as Stoffer describes, as a believer “is united with Christ in a psychological and volitional union.” Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 17.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 411.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

²⁰²*Ibid.*, 412.

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*

Pietists an essential emphasis was placed upon rebirth. Thus the initial stage in the (10) *salvation process* is rebirth. Then following the death of the old self, the light of Christ begins to grow within the individual allowing the person to experience the life of Christ in the world.²⁰⁵ Finally, after death, the light that was growing in the body becomes the "basis for resurrection." However, Radical Pietists would have denied a physical resurrection.²⁰⁶

The next doctrinal belief concerns (11) *voluntarism and predestination*. While from the human perspective, salvation was through faith, the Radical Pietists denied the Reformed doctrine of predestination that emphasized a deterministic view of God.²⁰⁷ For Boehme, God is a loving God who wills salvation to all people.²⁰⁸ According to Ensign, "Boehme had a hatred for the teaching of predestination, which kept even those radical Pietists of Reformed background from belief in it, and led them to oppose deterministic philosophies."²⁰⁹ Therefore Radical Pietists would tend toward a belief that the future is open.

(12) *Sanctification* was another of the doctrinal convictions of the Radical Pietists. All Pietists emphasized sanctification. They believed that followers of Christ must "abstain from all 'worldly' ways, and from sinful amusements."²¹⁰ Their doctrinal belief of sanctification focused on the obedient life. One should continuously obey the commands of God. While they would suggest that this be done until perfection is achieved, it must be noted that "perfection" does not imply faultlessness. Instead, it simply implies one's continual willingness to obey the commands of God "to the best of one's knowledge and ability."²¹¹

(13) *Universalism* was also a conviction of the Radical Pietists. Their understanding of universalism was based upon the idea that all of God's actions always worked toward

²⁰⁵Ibid., 413.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷This is of particular significance because the majority of Early Brethren left the Reformed tradition as briefly mentioned in chapter one.

²⁰⁸Ensign, Radical German Pietism, 413-414.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

²¹⁰Ibid., 414.

²¹¹Ibid.

redemption.²¹² This conviction extended to the belief that even God's punishments were for the purpose of redeeming souls.²¹³ There was also, however, the understanding that all people (as well as Satan and his angels) would pass through a purifying fire that would ultimately reconcile them to God.²¹⁴ While this was a generally held conviction, most were hesitant to proclaim this for fear that those who were not yet regenerate would resist living a holy life.

The final doctrine Ensign lists is (14) *apocalypticism*. This was a popular movement throughout the seventeenth century due to the Thirty Years' War. The war's impact left people looking for coming of their Saviour. The Radical Pietists carefully recorded catastrophes and other events that were understood as judgments from God.²¹⁵ However, for Boehme, there was no earthly millennium reign. Unlike the chiliastic understandings, Jesus' second coming was to be in spirit. Generally, the Radical Pietists expected the conversion of the "Jews and heathen."²¹⁶ Ensign states that "time-setting" was dissuaded, even though some still attempted to do so.²¹⁷

While Ensign offers a thorough detailed description of the Radical Pietists, Willoughby designates them as "Pietists who had been members of a local church, but who withdrew from active participation."²¹⁸ In the process of distinguishing the distinctive convictions of the Radical Pietists as to Willoughby's observations, it is necessary to note that the Radical Pietist movement was "essentially a protest against the state church."²¹⁹ Therefore as Willoughby offers four primary convictions of the Radical Pietists, with which the Early Brethren agreed, these convictions are stated in contradiction to the state church. Moreover, his description of the Radical Pietists focuses upon Ernst Hochmann and Samuel König. The purpose of this focus is due to the direct relationship that the Early Brethren shared with Hochmann.

²¹²Ibid., 415.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁵Ibid., 416.

²¹⁶Ibid.

²¹⁷Ibid.

²¹⁸Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 35.

²¹⁹Ibid., 38.

Between 1699 and 1700, Hochmann helped form a loosely organized fellowship called the Philadelphian fellowship or the "Society of Brothers."²²⁰ Renkewitz provides six distinguishing characteristics of this new group.²²¹ Of the six distinctive characteristics as provided by Renkewitz, Willoughby says that only four were agreed upon by the Early Brethren.²²² Willoughby's concludes that inasmuch as the Early Brethren were influenced by the Radical Pietists, they were equally troubled by the "individualism and the lack of continuing community," which were core elements of Radical Pietism.²²³ Donald Durnbaugh extends this conclusion in his work, Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Eighteenth Century Europe, when he infers that the Brethren entirely left behind Radical Pietism and adopted the tenets of Anabaptism.²²⁴ However, Ensign offers a contrary argument that suggests that the Early Brethren cannot be explained apart from Radical Pietism. In his

²²⁰Heinz Renkewitz, Hochmann von Hochenau: 1670-1721. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1993), 32.

²²¹Renkewitz, Hochmann von Hochenau (1670 - 1721), 34-35. "1) The basic principle is the expectation of the imminent return of Christ . . . 2) The new priesthood means a conquest of the former traditional priesthood . . . 3) The new priests are bound together in one order . . . 4) The loosing of all natural ties is the precondition for those who are ordained into the new priesthood . . . 5) The task of the new priests consists of sanctification for self and of sacrificial prayer for others . . . 6) Hochmann recognizes his special task to be that of warning of highly placed persons, kings, princes, and counts of the coming judgment, and leading them to a personal conversion before it is too late." Number two of the distinguishing characteristics uses the term "priesthood." It refers to the universal priesthood of all believers and it is used in the specific sense of Ernst Hochmann and Samuel König as instituting a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Willoughby notes that it is similar to the order instituted by the Philadelphian Society of England (101).

²²²See Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 39.

²²³Ibid. It is necessary to note that while Radical Pietists worshipped together and even lived in communal settings, the individualism that existed among them in contrast to the Anabaptists was the lack of accountability. Radical Pietists believed themselves accountable to no human institution nor assembly, they found their accountability only in the leading of the inner light. Radical Pietists were loosely affiliated with one another and often developed different beliefs. Alexander Mack expresses his criticism of this lack of accountability by answering Gruber's question regarding whether Brethren possessed more love before their baptism. He answers saying that they did not possess more love "unless this meant the simulated love which is feigned for the sake of bread or honor, and which does not punish sins or errors. This kind of love says: 'Leave me alone in my own will, opinion, and actions, and I will leave you alone in yours; we will love each other and be brethren.' . . . Unfortunately, we stayed long enough in this pernicious hypocritical love, while we were still among the Pietists." "Basic Questions," 38.

²²⁴Donald Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Eighteenth Century Europe. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, 1992), 64.

argument he emphasizes the many similarities that the Early Brethren shared with the Radical Pietists. He argues that they opposed the imputation theory of atonement; they opposed the Calvinist doctrine of predestination; they objected to eating blood; etc.²²⁵ Yet Ensign also acknowledges that the Anabaptists (Mennonites) also shared these beliefs. The point of the matter is that while the Early Brethren came out of Radical Pietism, they did not necessarily leave it behind. Ensign rightly acknowledges the overlapping of beliefs between the Radical Pietists and Anabaptists. Nevertheless, simply because the Early Brethren recognized the importance of community does not mean that they forfeited their Radical Pietist beliefs. The answer as to the identity (and thus the hermeneutical perspective) of the Early Brethren does not lie in either of the two points—Radical Pietism or Anabaptism. To answer this apparent dilemma, the identity of the Brethren has been characterized as a dialectic tension between (Radical) Pietism and Anabaptism.²²⁶ While the two traditions share many similar beliefs, the seeming dichotomies of community/individualism, inward/outward manifestations of spirituality appear to epitomize the tension that exists within the Early Brethren.

Stoffer describes the Radical Pietists as “one of the most colorful movements in the history of Christianity.”²²⁷ And as such its contributions to the Brethren convictions cannot be understated. The above description of the Pietistic movement (both Radical and Church Pietism) is but a brief outline of the significant contributions to Early Brethren thought. So having thus presented this Pietistic perspective as it has affected the Early Brethren, one finds several distinctive convictions extending out of their beliefs that contribute to the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective. Willoughby cites five convictions which contributed to the origin of Brethren beliefs:

1. The reality of religion is a spiritual experience.
2. The practice of devotional exercises.
3. The use of the Bible as the primary devotional book.
4. The Christian faith is expressed in moral behavior.

²²⁵Ensign, Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760). 276-291.

²²⁶Vernard Eller, “On Epitomizing the Brethren.” Brethren Life and Thought, VI, no. 4 (1961): 48. In this article, Eller, provides a convincing argument that suggests that an “either-or” approach to the question of Anabaptism or Pietism is incorrect. Very pointedly he says, “At heart, Brethrenism is a dialectic relationship, not a static principle” (48). He further clarifies this claim as to avoid any Hegelian sense of synthesis. He says that the tension that exists between the two points is the “actual creative point of focus” (48).

²²⁷Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987. 42.

5. The Christian faith is expressed in service to those in need.²²⁸ Yet this list is not complete because it does not express their protest against the institutional church nor does it express their separatistic nature (in that they left the established church). In the institutional church they recognized corruption and oppressive systems. They observed a religion barren of spirituality. Thus they sought spiritual renewal apart from the established church. This separatist attitude spawned the individualistic nature of Radical Pietism. In addition to the recognition of conviction for renewal, Radical Pietists possessed an openness to new insights and revelations apart from scripture.²²⁹

While the Brethren clearly emerged from the Radical Pietist movement, they also rejected the mystical and spiritualistic excesses of Radical Pietism as they found them not to be consistent with scripture.²³⁰ This is primarily demonstrated in Alexander Mack's treatise concerning questions raised about the Brethren *Gemeinde* by Eberhard Louis Gruber and the Inspirationists. However, elements of Pietism and Radical Pietism still existed in the Early Brethren regardless of their accepting an Anabaptist ecclesiology. Like the Pietists, the Early Brethren were critical of the established churches and of scholasticism; they studied the scriptures individually and corporately; they possessed the Pietist zeal for devotion; early on they struggled with the issue of marriage, accepting Hochmann's doctrine; experiential faith was emphasized in their fellowship; believers were to follow Christ and obey his commands; they strongly believed in the "priesthood of all saints;" finally, while not openly preaching it, the Early Brethren held to the doctrine of universal restoration.²³¹

²²⁸Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735. 68.

²²⁹Ensign, Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760). 411. Under his summary of "Bible and inspiration," he implies this openness when he says, "they no more thought that the day of revelation was over than that the age of grace was past." To support that this conviction of "openness," which was held by the Radical Pietists, had an impact upon the Early Brethren is expressed when Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, 49, describes the Early Brethren biblicism as follows: "One reason that they rejected creeds was that they had a lively expectation that God had more light yet to break through the pages of scripture as they studied together."

²³⁰For the Early Brethren, scripture is the test of the inner witness. Martin Schrag explains that "scripture is the basis for judging the validity of a person's Christianity" ("Early Brethren Concept of Authority," BLT. IX: Fall: 1964: 116). And the Early Brethren readily used scripture in this way when interacting with those outside their community.

²³¹This final doctrinal conviction is the view that God will certainly punish unbelieving sinners for their sin, but ultimately His love would overcome restoring them and bringing them into the "final state of blessedness." Alexander Mack is cautious in his teaching of this doctrine, stating, "Therefore, that is a much better and more blessed gospel which teaches how to escape the wrath of God than the gospel

Anabaptist

While the Early Brethren identity was initially formed in Radical Pietism, they experienced a shift when they acknowledged and embraced the significance of *Gemeinde*. Stoffer states that during the last half of the eighteenth century Mennonites and Radical Pietists developed close ties.²³² It is generally agreed by historians that there were many similarities between the two groups.²³³ Yet there are also differences between the two groups and each had an influence upon the Early Brethren.²³⁴ Thus we now turn to the other primary aspect that constitutes the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective—Anabaptism.

As has been established, the fundamental disposition of the Early Brethren was already founded within Radical Pietism. Thus the decision to form a *Gemeinde* was a move away from the Radical Pietist tenets of separatism and a move toward Anabaptist communalism. However, it is necessary to first discuss what is meant by the characterization "Anabaptist." Anabaptism has been defined many different ways. Some in western Christianity fail to recognize the significant and revolutionary nature of Anabaptism. This is best illustrated by the

which teaches that eternal punishment has an end." "Rights and Ordinances," 98.

²³²Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987. 57.

²³³See Durnbaugh, The Believer's Church. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1968); Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Eighteenth Century Europe; Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine; Ensign, "Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)"; Ernst Crous, "Anabaptism, Pietism, Rationalism and German Mennonites," The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), 237-248; F. Ernst Stoeffler German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), includes the Early Brethren among the Anabaptists while acknowledging their relationship to Hochmann von Hochenau, thus again accentuating the sometimes confusing similarities between the two groups; Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735.

²³⁴Ernst Crous, "Anabaptism, Pietism, Rationalism and German Mennonites," The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), 240-241. In this article, Crous cites and expands Friedmann, who observes two primary similarities between Pietism and Anabaptism. Friedmann says that Pietists and Anabaptists share two fundamental rejections, 1) the state church, and 2) confessional dogmatism. Crous goes on to delineate the differences between the two as being primarily that of "emphasis." He says, "Anabaptism stresses the fear of God (*Gottesfurcht*), Christian discipleship, following Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*) in love and the cross, and the fellowship of the unity of the Spirit (*Gemeinschaft der Geisteseinheit*). Pietism, on the other hand, stresses *Gottseligkeit*, a blissful devotional experience which enjoys the assurance of individual salvation; *praxis pietatis* in daily life, blissful form of devotion, together with a mild friendliness and morality, as well as the fellowship of the regenerated" (241). As can be seen, fundamental differences between the two are predominantly expressed in the tone of the description.

definition of Anabaptism given by mainline Protestantism.²³⁵ Willoughby begins his explanation of early Anabaptism as the "unwanted child of the Reformation."²³⁶ He explains that Anabaptism essentially moved within the lower classes, thus causing fear of civil uprising among the civil authorities.²³⁷ This, in addition to the tragic event at Münster, resulted in the antagonistic opposition of Anabaptism by the state churches and the ruling classes. Anabaptists became a marginalized, oppressed, and persecuted people. When referring to Anabaptism, this thesis refers to those Germanic groups who emphasize radical discipleship and "who effected a church life upon what they thought to be the pattern of the primitive church."²³⁸ This statement presupposes the affirmation of adult baptism upon confession of faith and the rejection of infant baptism. C. Arnold Snyder uses one of the earliest catechisms written for this movement as a means of describing it. Balthasar Hubmaier wrote this particularly interesting catechism that outlines the beliefs of the early Anabaptists. Snyder ensures that the "essentials he enumerated systematically were echoed (less systematically) by Anabaptists elsewhere."²³⁹ In his text regarding Anabaptist theology, Snyder demonstrates the general doctrinal agreement between

²³⁵Donald K. McKim, Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 9. In this work McKim defines Anabaptism as, "those who advocated rebaptism in certain instances. Most prominently, the 16th century reformers who renounced infant baptism, stressed the literal reading of scripture, and supported separation of church and state." As can be observed this definition fails to express the significant contributions of Anabaptism to Christianity. Many definitions seem to home in on two or three characteristics, while failing to acknowledge the most significant tenets of their doctrinal beliefs, i.e. nonresistance, brotherly love, praxis-oriented faith, radical discipleship, etc.

²³⁶Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735, 42. Interestingly enough, C. Arnold Snyder uses remarkably similar language describing the Anabaptist movement. He says, "Anabaptism was a reform movement born at the time and in the context of the Protestant Reformation, an unwanted and unloved 'stepchild' of the mainline reformers . . ." Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction. (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995), 1.

²³⁷Ibid., 42.

²³⁸Willoughby (51) cites Franklin Littell's definition from The Anabaptist View of the Church: a Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism. 2nd ed., (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), xviii. This understanding can be expanded further as the early Anabaptists believed themselves to be the true church and had completely and enthusiastically committed themselves to the body of Christ on earth. Snyder (Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction, 1ff.) points out the negative connotations that the term Anabaptism carried with it. This group of committed believers were thus labelled with a term used to categorize one of the two heresies warranting death. It is interesting that while term literally means "re-baptizer," the Anabaptists considered themselves merely Baptists because they were convinced that infant baptism was not baptism.

²³⁹Snyder, Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction, 83.

the many branches of Anabaptism by breaking down Hubmaier's catechism into an orderly outline of Anabaptist belief and doctrine. A central factor for Anabaptism was their emphasis upon the "inner and outer" transformation and the sanctification of believers.²⁴⁰ These radical disciples held to a stringent ecclesiology²⁴¹ that required outward (visible) signs of one's faith.

The question now arises as to the extent and nature of influence that the Anabaptists (specifically the Mennonites) had upon the Early Brethren. Willoughby states that there was a definite Mennonite presence in the Palatinate.²⁴² Moreover, while Mack was travelling the region with Hochmann, it is told by Mack Jr. that the two would "now and then" visit Mennonite congregations to preach.²⁴³ In addition to the historical records of the Mennonite presence, there is implicit evidence as to the familiarity of the Early Brethren with the Mennonites. In his tract, "Basic Questions," Alexander Mack states that the Early Brethren agreed fully with all the doctrines of the Mennonites.²⁴⁴ Yet regardless of the many similarities shared between the Early Brethren's pietistic background and the Anabaptists, Anabaptism still provided significant and unique effects upon the Early Brethren.

According to Harold Bender, there were three core beliefs and teachings of the Anabaptists: "first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance."²⁴⁵ While this is an oversimplification of the complex doctrines of Anabaptist beliefs, Snyder's thorough examination of Anabaptist theology can be summed up in these three statements.

In his work, Willoughby, offers some Anabaptist beliefs which he believes directly

²⁴⁰Ibid., 95.

²⁴¹Ibid., 90. Snyder notes that the majority of doctrinal emphasis lies within their ecclesiology.

²⁴²Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735, 46.

²⁴³Willoughby cites Alexander Mack Jr. from Henry Kurtz' The Brethren's Encyclopedia, Containing the United Counsels and Conclusions of the Brethren, at their Annual Meetings. (Columbiana: Henry Kurtz, 1867).

²⁴⁴Alexander Mack, "Basic Questions," The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1991), 37.

²⁴⁵Harold S. Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), 42.

affected the Early Brethren.²⁴⁶ However, only three of the characteristics affected the Early Brethren: the Apostolic model as the basis of the *Gemeinde*, the existential nature of faith, and the Ban. Stoffer suggests that the existential character of the Mennonites was due to several distinctive emphases: they viewed Christ as the model for the new life; they had a straightforward approach to scripture, which emphasized the Gospels rather than the Pauline epistles; they possessed a conception of soteriology that understood all aspects of conversion directed toward radical discipleship; they believed in the kerygmatic qualities of the ordinances; and they had a limited eschatology of the visible church.²⁴⁷ Unlike the Protestant groups, the Anabaptists did not dichotomize between faith and obedience. For them faith was obedience. A central focus of their faith was "taking up one's cross and following." Thus the Anabaptists could be characterized as a *Gemeinde* organized according to the Apostolic model and whose faith was existential. The fact that Alexander Mack says, "We are completely agreed with them as far as their doctrine is concerned, which does not teach anything in contradiction to the gospel,"²⁴⁸ testifies to the extent of the similarities the two groups shared.

However, once again we must discern to what extent the Anabaptists affected the Early Brethren. While Mack certainly agreed with the Anabaptist doctrines, he also believed them to be an inferior fellowship.²⁴⁹ While this denotes a difference in practice or more accurately an objection to their lifestyle, Mack qualifies this statement as being based upon their being "deteriorated in doctrine and life."²⁵⁰ But what does he mean by this? Perhaps a clue as to the

²⁴⁶See Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735, 56.

²⁴⁷Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 56.

²⁴⁸Alexander Mack, "Basic Questions," The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack, 37.

²⁴⁹In Mack's tract, "Basic Questions," he responds to questions of doctrine posed by Eberhard Gruber (A leader of the Inspirationists movement in Germany) concerning the Early Brethren *Gemeinde*. As to this particular quotation, Mack was responding to Gruber's question (question #33), "Do you regard your church as superior to those of all other Baptist-Minded (*Taufgesinnte*) of these or previous times, and if so, in which way and why?" Mack's answer to this is, "It is true that we consider our church fellowship superior to these now-deteriorated Baptists (Mennonites), with whom we are acquainted, and whom we know. The reason is that they have deteriorated in doctrine and life, and have strayed far from the doctrine and life of the old Baptists (Anabaptists). Many of them notice this and realize it themselves. We cannot answer concerning the previous Baptists, because we did not know them in life. We are completely agreed with them as far as their doctrine is concerned, which does not teach anything in contradiction to the gospel." Alexander Mack, "Basic Questions," The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack, 37.

²⁵⁰Ibid.

source of this statement can be found in Friedrich Arnold's criticism of the Anabaptists as Stoffer points out. Arnold criticizes the Anabaptists for their literal reading and following of scripture, which Arnold sees as the cause of their legalism and "Pharisaism," and their divisiveness.²⁵¹ He sees this manifested in pride, willfulness, and legalism.²⁵² However, while there may be some truth to this suggestion, a more obvious reason for the criticism given by Mack may stem from the ongoing issue of baptism. Mack emphatically disagreed with the Mennonites' mode of baptism. If one's faith practice is to remain consistent with scripture, it must be carried out likewise especially regarding the ordinances.

It has been argued by others that Radical Pietism had a far greater impact upon Anabaptism than *vice versa*.²⁵³ Likewise Anabaptism affected the Early Brethren (who came directly out of Radical Pietism) to a lesser degree than has been argued by other scholars. This conclusion would coincide with Ensign's argument that the majority of Early Brethren beliefs were derived from Radical Pietism rather than Anabaptism.²⁵⁴ Ensign argues that while Willoughby demonstrates the Anabaptist influence upon the Early Brethren, the Radical Pietists held to most of the same beliefs.²⁵⁵ This observation would suggest that rather than the Early Brethren being primarily influenced by the Anabaptists when they formalized their fellowship, that it would have been almost natural for them to look toward Anabaptism to supplement their Radical Pietist beliefs as they sought to form a *Gemeinde*. While Willoughby suggests ten

²⁵¹Interestingly enough this same judgment has been made against the Pietists as was earlier stated.

²⁵²Stoffer cites Gottfried Arnold [*Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-historie*. Vol. 1 (Schaffhausen: Emanuel and Benedict Hurter, 1740). 1:2, 16, 21, 7:859; 1:2, 16, 21, 39:874; 2:2, 17, 12, 31:167], *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 57. It is important to note that C. Arnold Snyder convincingly disputes this claim asserting that there were a diversity of biblical approaches among the distinctive Anabaptist communities, thus disallowing any overarching statements regarding an Anabaptist hermeneutic (Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, 161). Moreover, Snyder begins his argument regarding this issue stating that there was both a diversity in methodology and a consensus regarding the interpretative tradition which directly affects the "hermeneutical perspective" (159, 365-376). While Snyder's criticism may be inherently correct, the fact of the matter was that the Brethren acknowledged and affirmed this criticism thus establishing themselves as a distinctive identity wholly separate from the Anabaptist community.

²⁵³Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries: Its Genius and its Literature*. (Goshen: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), 217.

²⁵⁴Ensign, *Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)*. 278.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*

Anabaptist beliefs that were incorporated into the Early Brethren consciousness, it should be noted that seven of the suggested beliefs were shared by the Radical Pietists and thus already held by the Early Brethren. The three that distinguish Anabaptism from Radical Pietism were: "1) they were joining the True Church established by Jesus; 2) they deliberately organized their Gemeinde after the pattern and spirit of the New Testament, Apostolic church; 3) the ban should be used against all who, having been baptized, yet stumble into sin."²⁵⁶ While there is no doubt that Anabaptism affected the Early Brethren in life and practice, the Early Brethren were not indisputably Anabaptist as were the Mennonites. Their Radical Pietist convictions remained. This is especially illustrated with Alexander Mack's criticism of the Mennonites. Thus it can only be stated substantially that Anabaptism affected or contributed to the Early Brethren in terms of organization and discipline. The core convictions, therefore, which Anabaptism affected upon Early Brethrenism concern the formation of the *Gemeinde* and the discipline which it would follow.

The Dialectic Tension

In 1961 Vernard Eller published an article with the purpose of epitomizing the Church of the Brethren identity. His articulation of the Brethren identity describes a dialectic tension which he saw existing between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism.²⁵⁷ Unlike a Hegelian dialectic which results in synthesis, Eller argues that it is a relational dialectic that serves as a checks and balance. Eller describes it as follows:

When the Radical Pietist tendency would slide off into subjectivism, private inspiration, mysticism, enthusiasm, or vaporous spiritualism, it is pulled up short by the demand for concrete, outward obedience to an objective Scriptural norm. Conversely, when the Anabaptist tendency would slide off into formalism, legalism, biblical literalism, or works-righteousness, it is checked by the reminder that faith is essentially a work of God within the heart of the individual believer, an intensely personal relationship rather than a legal one. Thus within Brethrenism, Anabaptist influences *discipline* Pietism at the same time that Pietist influences *inspire* Anabaptism.²⁵⁸

This idea of dialectic tension counters the earlier arguments by both Ensign and Willoughby who provide convincing arguments as to the Brethren identity being an either/or

²⁵⁶Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735, 56.

²⁵⁷Eller, "On Epitomizing the Brethren," 48.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 49-50.

choice (either Radical Pietist or Anabaptist). As the Early Brethren began to navigate the waters of their new *Gemeinde*, it is plausible that Eller's dialectic tension existed as this new community began attempting to reconcile both sets of beliefs in their daily practice. After all, life practice was the validation of faith.

However, Eller's dialectic tension theory is based upon the premise that there exists distinctive, perhaps even contradictory, differences between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. Eller defines this difference as being an *inner* and *outer* distinction. He argues that the Radical Pietists emphasized an inner spirituality while the Anabaptists emphasized an outer obedience. However, at least two questions arise from Eller's concept. First, is "dialectic tension" an adequate description of the Brethren's unique and complex identity? And second, do distinctive differences exist between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism to the extent Eller suggests? In other words, does Anabaptism emphasize an outward obedience and not an inward devotion? And does Radical Pietism really emphasize an inward devotion and not an outward obedience?

In Eller's argument, regarding the "dialectic tension," there is a sense of contradiction and a pulling back and forth that exists in the tension as he states that the Brethren identity is not static. Even as Eller attempts to alleviate this sense using concepts of checks and balances one must question if Radical Pietism and Anabaptism are contradictory in some sense. While his illustration and explanation make sense in a general way, some of the specifics, such as the issues of the categorizing of Anabaptism as outward and Radical Pietism as inward, begin to break down under closer scrutiny. First, it is difficult to categorize the Anabaptists generally due in most part to the diversity that exists within the tradition. In a recent work, C. Arnold Snyder presents a history of Anabaptism that portrays the Anabaptists as struggling with an *inner/outer* tension similar to that of the Brethren.²⁵⁹ In this argument he describes two primary schools of thought: the spiritualist or those emphasizing the inner, and the literalists or those emphasizing the outer.²⁶⁰ This argument alone illustrates the inability to classify Anabaptism as simply emphasizing outer obedience. Second, contrary to Eller, Radical Pietism certainly calls for outward expressions of faith as is illustrated in their conviction that faith is expressed in moral behavior. Surely Radical Pietists also emphasized good works and charity in their expression of

²⁵⁹C. Arnold Snyder, Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction. (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995), 299ff.

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 300.

faith.

This then raises the second question posed previously, "do contradicting differences exist between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism?" According to Carl F. Bowman, the currents of Anabaptism and Radical Pietism are "mutually reinforcing."²⁶¹ He says, "Viewing Pietism and Anabaptism as *mutually reinforcing currents* . . . illuminates the fact that heightened (or lessened) spirituality may produce heightened (or lessened) obedience and church commitment."²⁶² Yet even in Bowman's description, the concern is between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. Perhaps the answer to this sense of tension with the inner and outer is not found between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism, but is simply an aspect of Christian faith. Even the Anabaptists experienced a tension between the inner (spiritual) and the outer (obedience). Maybe what the Brethren have been experiencing is the same inward and outward dynamic that Christians have been experiencing for centuries. This is not to lessen the contributions Radical Pietism and Anabaptism have brought to the Brethren identity, but it is to suggest that the tension Eller intuitively discerned does not exist between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism, at least not how he means it. I would argue instead that the identity of the Brethren is a complex interrelationship of their unique narratives and convictions which derive from both Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. It must be understood that their identity is not duplicitous, but a unified interrelationship of their community's shared memories and the convictions they have discerned from scripture. Furthermore I would argue that the tension which Eller discerns exists in the inward and outward aspects of authentic faith, and that the tension which certainly does exist between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism is found in the form of individualism and community.

As has already been discussed, Radical Pietists believed celibacy (involving marriage to Sophia) as being most desirable and they were extreme separatists having no formal organization but living in loose affiliation with one another. In addition, Radical Pietists believed themselves accountable to no human or human institution. In fact, they resisted forming any formal fellowship as to avoid following in the errors of the established church. These illustrate the individualistic tendencies of Radical Pietism. On other hand the Anabaptists emphasized community holding to a strong ecclesiology that incorporated the ban as a means of accountability. They lived in interdependent communities relying upon each other for the

²⁶¹Carl F. Bowman, Brethren Society. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995), 46.

²⁶²Ibid.

expression of Christ's love. Bender describes them in terms of brotherhood, love, and nonresistance, all terms characteristic of community.²⁶³ While even the Radical Pietists held to some of these as well, the most distinctive difference was the sense of brotherhood and accountability.

While the tension of the inner and outer certainly exists in Brethrenism, it concerns faith and is not a question of Anabaptism or Radical Pietism. The reality is, both Anabaptism and Radical Pietism experience this same inner and outer tension. However, a tension does exist between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. One that strikes at the foundation of the Brethren: the issue of individualism (autonomy) and community (accountability).

The Early Brethren Bible Reading Method

For both Anabaptists and Radical Pietists scripture is the foundation of their faith. Yet unlike the Anabaptists, the Radical Pietists "reasoned that since all 'sects' appeal to Scripture and yet are 'godless' one cannot prove one's faith from Scripture."²⁶⁴ Alexander Mack directly answers this question, citing 2 Timothy 3:15-17 to emphasize the importance of scripture as authoritative for faith and practice.²⁶⁵ Thus, from their formation, even as scripture has served as the basis of their faith Brethren have read scripture simplistically. As Durnbaugh has said, "One way to describe their approach is to say that they were biblicists, taking the Bible at face value."²⁶⁶ To better understand the context of the Early Brethren approach one must remember their Pietist beginnings. One of the primary convictions of Pietism was that any "awakened Christian" could and should study the Bible.²⁶⁷ In the spirit of reform, Pietism sought to liberate Christians from the "Orthodox mechanical material view of Scripture."²⁶⁸ Thus Pietism freed the

²⁶³Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, 42.

²⁶⁴Schrag, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," 121.

²⁶⁵Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," 81-82.

²⁶⁶Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, 49.

²⁶⁷Cited in Willoughby, The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735, 30. In this passage, Willoughby cites Phillip Schaff as saying that Pietism by "granting the 'awakened' Christian full capacity for independent study of the Bible, Pietism restored to laymen the right which they had lost." Phillip Schaff, History of the Christian Church. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), IX, 62.

²⁶⁸As has been characterized by Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 17.

Bible from the rationalistic and formalistic approaches of the state churches. Stoffer adds that for Pietism a central component of their approach was the "conviction that Scripture does not become effective mechanically but must be brought to life in the soul by the Holy Spirit."²⁶⁹ This recognition implies that the hermeneut is not the sole interpreter, nor is the scripture the sole source of meaning. The Pietists (as do the Anabaptists) take seriously the role of the Spirit in the interpretation process to such an extent as to trust that the Spirit will lead an untrained layperson to an understanding of scripture.

The stalwart of Pietism, Spener, set out to liberate laypeople and encourage an enthusiastic study of the scriptures. Even while he was encouraging the open study of scripture in conventicles, he was sure to always stipulate the presence of the pastor.²⁷⁰ Regardless of this effort for some sort of controlling factor, "a discussion format" was used that allowed equal opportunity to share insight and knowledge.²⁷¹ It was Spener's intent to free the scriptures from the dogmatism and credalism that infected the church. Stoffer elaborates this point, "If Scripture was to be the supreme authority, one must not limit its voice by finding in the Bible only what was sanctioned by the creeds."²⁷² This serves as the basis for an openness in the interpretative process for the Early Brethren as well as the importance of Bible study in community and not merely as individuals, which is the Anabaptist ideal for a hermeneutical community.

In addition to this emphasis upon Bible study, the Anabaptists emphasized the necessity to obey the scripture. In Wenger's article, he describes the Anabaptists as holding strictly to the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura* unlike the Reformers who were not consistent with this.²⁷³ This existential approach to scripture meant that not only were believers to read scripture but also obey it. Discipleship is always a core concern for an Anabaptist approach to scripture. While Anabaptists share some of the same convictions with the Pietists concerning scripture, for them application is the heart of biblical interpretation and accountability to the interpretation was

²⁶⁹Ibid.

²⁷⁰Richard L. Gawthrop, Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108-109.

²⁷¹Ibid., 109.

²⁷²Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 17.

²⁷³John C. Wenger, "Biblicism of the Anabaptists," The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. (Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1957), 170-171.

the communal responsibility. In the same way application was central for Early Brethren interpretation.

The Brethren and Scripture

From the very beginnings of the Brethren movement, this group of people were considered by others and themselves as "people of the Word." The significance of the Bible is found in the complex authoritative role it plays for the Early Brethren *Gemeinde*. While they continued to hold to the inner leading of the Spirit of Christ, as Hochmann taught them, when they formed the *Gemeinde* a shift occurred in their convictions as well. Obedience became the ultimate expression of faith.²⁷⁴ Yet even while there is significant evidence of their elevated emphasis on scripture (the outer Word) as the supreme authority, it is equally true that they recognized and emphasized the authority of the inner Word. In his article, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," Martin Schrag observed that Alexander Mack affirmed "both the inner witness and its authority and the outer witness and its authority."²⁷⁵ He further clarifies this idea as such:

Just because the Scripture is inspired and is the outward form of the message given innerly to the apostles should not lead one to believe that one can come to the outer as the starting point. Scripture cannot be understood until the "inner ears" have been opened. It is possible to read Scripture, talk about Scripture, but "if the spirit of faith is not in him," he will not understand the message.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴In his journal article, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority" (114), Martin Schrag expresses the extent of this shift as well as its significance. He says, "The basic thrust of the letter is that of obedience and discipleship to the teachings and example of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the authority. It is absolutely necessary to be baptized according to the example, the command, and the teaching of Jesus Christ and the apostles. It is necessary to 'publicly profess that which Christ Jesus taught and did without hesitation or fear of men.' Nothing is better than obedience. The disciples sealed their obedience with their blood. All righteousness must be fulfilled. Obedience is so important that those who do not obey have no God. The test of the faith is obedience. Obedience is necessary for salvation." This underscores the extent to which the Early Brethren understood the interrelationship of faith and obedience.

²⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 121.

²⁷⁶Here Schrag (*ibid.*, 122) explains the relationship of the "inner" and "outer" Word, while quoting Alexander Mack as cited in Durnbaugh's *European Origins of the Brethren*. (Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1958), 385. Mack says, "No one may say to a believer that he should and must believe and obey the Scriptures, because no one can be a believer without the Holy Spirit. . . That which the Holy Spirit ordained for the faithful was written outwardly. All believers are united in it, for the Holy Spirit teaches them inwardly just as the Scriptures teach them outwardly." (The previous quotation is also found in Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*, 83.) This discussion clearly

Therefore, authority did not lie solely upon the outer word, but the convicting Spirit of Christ (the inner Word) was recognized as an equally essential authority.²⁷⁷ In his article, "Brethren and the Bible," Richard B. Gardner describes the Early Brethren idea of "authority" using four basic statements:

1. Scripture itself is viewed as a product of divine inspiration.
2. The Spirit creates faith in and understanding of the message of Scripture.
3. The Spirit continues to reveal and instruct, writing God's word inwardly in the hearts of the faithful.
4. The inward word of the Spirit agrees fully with the outward word of Scripture.²⁷⁸

For the Early Brethren, authority ultimately rests in God as revealed in Jesus Christ.²⁷⁹ This christocentric emphasis of authority extends to their christocentric approach to scripture.

reflects the effect Reformed (Calvin) tradition had upon the Brethren. In chapter 7 of his Institutes. (Albany: Ages Software, 1997), 100, Calvin discusses the necessity of the Holy Spirit's testimony upon the individual as a prerequisite for understanding the Holy Scriptures.

²⁷⁷Both Schrag, "Early Brethren Concept of Authority," and Durnbaugh, "Brethren and the Authority of Scripture," BLT, 13:1968, 170-183, express the necessity of both the "inner Word" and "outer Word" as authoritative. According to both, the "outer Word" is dependent upon the inward testimony of the "inner Word" so that the individual encountering the scripture might understand the message. It is necessary to note that the Brethren belief regarding the "inner Word" insists that its ministry upon the individual is not limited to illumination but is inclusive of empowering the individual to obeying the Word. It is necessary to note here that this is a primary distinguishing factor between the Anabaptists (Mennonites) and the Early Brethren. In John Wenger's article, "Biblicism of the Anabaptists," he states that "they followed rigorously the principle of *sola scriptura*: only the Bible is to be followed" [Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), 171.]. Wenger further expresses this citing Harold Bender, saying, "It alone was authoritative for doctrine and life, for all worship and activity, for all church regulations and discipline." Dale Stoffer argues that the Brethren also were in full agreement with the "great Reformation" principle, *sola scriptura* (Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 71). However, while it is true that the Early Brethren affirmed this principle, it does not necessarily mean they shared the same understanding of it. Unlike the Anabaptists, the Early Brethren held the supreme authority as resting in "God as revealed in Jesus Christ" rather than in scripture alone. In Early Brethrenism there is always a sense that the Spirit is involved in interpretation. While I generally agree with Stoffer that all the strands of the Reformation considered the scriptures as normative and divine, I must also acknowledge that the Early Brethren's sense of authority was more complex in that it anticipated new understandings to be revealed within the scripture through the ministry of the "Inner Word." Their's was not a simple pragmatic literalism. The Early Brethren recognized the role and experience of the inner workings of the Spirit of Christ.

²⁷⁸Richard B. Gardner, "Brethren and the Bible," BLT, 28:1983, 7-8. The significance of this list as Gardner notes, is that the Brethren "generally resisted attempts to separate God's authority and scriptural authority" (8).

²⁷⁹Ibid.

Christocentric Interpretative Approach

While the Early Brethren recognized all scripture to be inspired and authoritative, their approach to scripture was christocentric. In "Basic Questions," Alexander Mack articulates the christocentric approach in terms of "fulfillment in the context of continuity."²⁸⁰ Answering questions 6, 10, and 11, Mack says that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and in being such has "annulled the first law because it was too weak and could not make anyone perfect."²⁸¹ Mack then says that Christ "secured redemption, revealed the paths to the Holy of Holies, and gave only laws of life."²⁸² "For this reason," he says, "the teachings of Jesus are rightly to be observed by believers in these days."²⁸³ Thus, for the Early Brethren the life and teachings of Jesus Christ were of supreme importance, being valued above the rest of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. They also held the New Testament above the Old Testament in that it fulfils the Old Testament. This elevation of the New Testament over the Old reflects the similarity Anabaptists shared with the Early Brethren as to valuing the New Testament over the Old. However, the Anabaptist view of scripture was somewhat different.²⁸⁴ It is generally agreed that the Early Brethren believed they were called to obedience and discipleship to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. As Schrag rightly notes the christocentric nature of the new *Gemeinde*, "The literal observation of the example and commandments of the Lord Jesus was the new emphasis."²⁸⁵

While the Early Brethren certainly held a christocentric approach to scripture, their interpretation of scripture bears more distinctions. Richard B. Gardner writes concerning the Brethren as he describes their approach to biblical interpretation, he says that "at least five

²⁸⁰Schrag, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," 119.

²⁸¹Mack, "Basic Questions," 24-25.

²⁸²Ibid., 25.

²⁸³Ibid.

²⁸⁴Wenger, "Biblicism of the Anabaptists," 176. Wenger describes their view as follows: "The Anabaptists regarded scripture as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. But they placed a strong emphasis upon the preparatory role of the Old Testament. They felt that God's final word was in the New Testament, not in the preparatory dispensation of the Old."

²⁸⁵Schrag, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," 115.

distinguishing marks characterize the way Brethren interpret the Bible."²⁸⁶

1. Brethren have insisted on reading the Bible with an attitude of openness to new truth.
2. Brethren have approached the Bible with a desire to recover and emulate primitive Christianity.
3. Brethren have interpreted the Old Testament in light of the New Testament in terms of the commands and examples of Jesus Christ.
4. Brethren have emphasized an intrinsic connection between knowing the truth and doing the truth.
5. Brethren have stressed the importance of the community of believers studying the Bible together.²⁸⁷

One conviction is not expressed in the above list: no force in religion (which is a significant factor even to the present). The idea of "no force in religion" is based in the experience of the Early Brethren who refused to affirm the doctrines of the institutional church and were consequently persecuted. Both Anabaptists and Radical Pietists experienced persecution because of their supposed "unorthodoxy." Therefore it was a central conviction for this community that one cannot force another to believe as they do, because the work of persuasion was the work of the Holy Spirit.²⁸⁸

Openness to New Understandings

From the forming of their *Gemeinde* there was always an attitude of seeking an informed reading of scripture. While Durnbaugh rightly states that the Brethren took the Bible at face value, he also notes their openness to receive assistance by those who understood the biblical languages.²⁸⁹ He describes their Bible reading method as being a "straightforward, commonsense manner."²⁹⁰ Their desire for an informed reading points back to their very beginnings when Alexander Mack studied "trustworthy histories" that would offer more guidance

²⁸⁶Richard B. Gardner, "Bible," The Brethren Encyclopedia. (Philadelphia: The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1983), 134.

²⁸⁷Ibid.

²⁸⁸Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack, 83.

²⁸⁹Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, 49.

²⁹⁰Ibid.

in forming the new *Gemeinde*.²⁹¹ In addition to this example, the Early Brethren further demonstrated an interest for an informed reading when they adjusted their communion service by placing footwashing before love feast in the service. Durnbaugh describes this as follows:

He (Alexander Mack Jr.) first described how they had washed feet after the meal and the breaking of the bread, and then how, after they "saw a little nearer," they washed feet before the breaking of bread. "Then when Reitz published the New Testament, and a brother came among us, who understood Greek, and pointed out to us properly, how Jesus washed feet before supper."²⁹²

This desire for an informed reading by further study was by no means required by all believers. It can generally be stated that the Early Brethren were uneducated. However, to compensate for this they believed that the "Holy Spirit would assist the faithful."²⁹³

In addition to the outer Word and the inner Word, there is also a third factor to be considered, i.e., the community. While the Early Brethren read the outer Word, they relied upon the inner Word for spiritual illumination. However, Bible study was not an individual prospect. The *Gemeinde* played a central role in the comprehension of scripture. Much like the Pietists and Anabaptists, the Early Brethren studied the Bible as a community. Yet unlike the Radical Pietists they did not accept any free interpretation and scripture was the basis of faith.²⁹⁴ If the validating factor for interpretation was not based upon methodology, then what was the controlling factor for biblical interpretation in the Early Brethren community? In essence it was a combination of three components: the written word (outer Word), the Holy Spirit (inner Word), and the community. The community shaped the interpretation process by the convictions that it held. These convictions, which arose from Bible study and life experience, also served to shape the way that the Early Brethren read and understood scripture. For instance, their conviction of possessing an attitude of "openness" when studying the Bible liberated the scriptures from

²⁹¹Durnbaugh, Brethren Beginnings: The Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe, 21.

²⁹²Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Brethren and the Authority of Scriptures," BLT, 13:1968, 174.

²⁹³Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, 49.

²⁹⁴While Radical Pietists resisted a scriptural basis for faith, as is expressed by Alexander Mack in "Rights and Ordinances," (81ff), for the Early Brethren "The true faith which is genuine and which is promised eternal life must be a Scriptural faith . . ." (80).

formalistic methods.²⁹⁵ This conviction affected an openness in the interpretation process. In addition to this it must be emphasized that the Early Brethren practised Bible study in community. Durnbaugh expresses both the significance of community and of openness, saying, "One reason that they rejected creeds was that they had a lively expectation that God had more light yet to break through the pages of scripture as they studied it together."²⁹⁶

A Threefold Interrelationship

Therefore the Early Brethren Bible reading method could be summarized as a threefold interrelationship²⁹⁷ between the written (outer) Word, the Holy Spirit (inner Word), and the community. While the new *Gemeinde* read the scripture in a straightforward, commonsense manner, the Holy Spirit (inner Word) convicts the *Gemeinde* to respond pragmatically. Yet the interpretation of the scripture is consequently controlled by the convictions of the community, which originally arose from prayer and study in the context of their historical background (shared experiences). In this sense the Spirit-led community shapes the interpretation of the scripture. It must be understood that for the Early Brethren, only the person and thus the community who is illuminated by the Spirit can understand and believe the scriptures.²⁹⁸ Therefore, the Early Brethren, having shared particular experiences including specific convictions by the Holy Spirit

²⁹⁵In describing the Pietistic approach to scripture, Stoffer says that it "quite effectively freed the Scriptures from any formalistic methods of interpretation." Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987, 17.

²⁹⁶*Ibid.*

²⁹⁷This concept of a three way negotiation for meaning was first offered by Kenneth J. Archer in his doctoral thesis. In it he describes this process as follows: "The role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process is to lead and guide the community in understanding the present meaningfulness of Scripture. . . Thus the Spirit does speak and has more to say than just Scripture. This requires the community to discern the Spirit in the process of negotiating the meaning of the biblical texts as the community faithfully carries on the mission of Jesus into new, different and future contexts. . . For this reason, the voice of the Spirit cannot be reduced to simple recitation of Scripture, nonetheless it will be connected to the concerned Scripture" ("Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century," 213-214). While this description is specifically targeted toward the Pentecostal community, it rings especially true for the Early Brethren community. Their openness to new understandings predisposes the willingness to allow the Spirit to lead their community into new understandings. Moreover this model remains anchored to scripture, thus alleviating the Early Brethren concern of falling into Radical Pietist excesses. For the purpose of clarity, I have opted to describe the interrelationship between the Spirit, scripture, and community as being a "threefold" interrelationship.

²⁹⁸Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack, 83.

through scripture, have a distinctive approach to scripture. In other words, the Early Brethren being a Spirit-led community, approach scripture from a particular and distinctive perspective, thus affecting particular scriptural interpretations.

Summary

The purpose for this chapter has been to define the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren; to define and describe both Radical Pietism and Anabaptism, which essentially contribute to the Brethren identity and thus their perspective; and finally to describe how the Early Brethren interpreted scripture. In the process of these descriptions I have argued against any simplistic definition of the Early Brethren, specifically as being either Anabaptist or Radical Pietist. While the Early Brethren certainly possess characteristics of both and share similar convictions with both Anabaptism and Radical Pietism, neither term adequately defines them. It has been demonstrated that the first eight brothers and sisters left the established churches (6 from the Reformed church and 2 from the Lutheran) and joined the loosely affiliated Radical Pietists led by Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau. Essentially the Early Brethren were a group of Radical Pietists who became disenchanted with the state church and who had broken completely away from it. Then following substantial prayer and scriptural study, they decided to form a *Gemeinde* of brothers and sisters sharing in adult baptism by immersion. This brief summary of their development illustrates both the Radical Pietist and Anabaptist influence upon the Early Brethren. However following these descriptions, the question arises as to the extent to which both contributed to the Early Brethren identity and the interaction that occurs between them in the process.

Therefore, special attention was given to Vernard Eller's argument that the Brethren identity is a dialectic tension between Pietism and Anabaptism. This dialectic tension, he argued, is not a Hegelian one, but rather a relational tension. His argument was based upon the assumptions that a tension exists between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. The tension takes form in that Anabaptism emphasizes outer obedience over inner spirituality and Radical Pietism vice versa. Their interaction occurs as they mutually reinforce one another through a series of checks and balances. However, by demonstrating the inability of the dialectic tension to describe the complexity of Early Brethren identity and by challenging the nature of Eller's dialectic tension, I argued that the tension existing between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism is not inner/outer but is individualism/community.

Finally, I argued that the Early Brethren approached scripture in a "straightforward manner;" that they read the scriptures applying common sense. I also argued that while they possessed a somewhat unique understanding of scriptural authority, they also held an openness to being enlightened to new truths as they were led by the Holy Spirit. Noting the similarities between Archer's "tridactic interrelationship" model of scriptural interpretation with that of the Early Brethren, I argued that their reading method was best described as a threefold interrelationship between the written word, the Holy Spirit, and the community.

In the process defining the hermeneutical perspective of the CoB, this thesis has thus far sketched the historical narrative of the CoB and has answered the questions regarding the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective, the nature of their identity, and how they interpreted scripture. However, by doing this, four additional questions are raised and will be answered in the chapter 3. First, as has been mentioned upon occasion, the CoB is a "hermeneutical community." What does this mean? Secondly, what is the difference between the narrative convictions of the Early Brethren and the present CoB? How have they changed, if at all? And finally, how has this affected their approach to scripture and how do they currently interpret scripture?

CHAPTER THREE

A Hermeneutical Community

*“Christ Jesus says, ‘Count well the cost
When you lay the foundation.’
Are you resolved, though all seem lost,
To risk your reputation,
Your self, your wealth, for Christ the Lord
As you now give your solemn word?”²⁹⁹ -Alexander Mack*

Introduction

The concept of the Brethren (CoB) being a “hermeneutical community” is based upon Ranier W. Burkart’s interpretive summary of Stoffer’s conclusions concerning Brethren convictions. In it Burkart paraphrases Stoffer’s six “foundational convictions” to which the Brethren held. The sixth of which he states, “The congregation is the place in which the will of God must be worked out. It is a hermeneutical community.”³⁰⁰ Admittedly, this is not unlike how other Christian communities understand themselves. However, the significance of this statement lies not in the commonality found with other fellowships but in the distinctive forms of conviction which shape the *Gemeinde*’s interpretations.³⁰¹ Consequently we must ask, “What does it mean to be a hermeneutical community?” John Howard Yoder popularized the term “hermeneutical community” in the late 1960’s in a paper he wrote concerning Anabaptist hermeneutics. In his article he argues that for Anabaptists, the congregation is the place in which scripture is best interpreted.³⁰² However, in this chapter I will answer this question along

²⁹⁹Alexander Mack, William Eberly, ed., “Count the Cost,” The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1991), 107. This is the first verse of a hymn which has been attributed to Alexander Mack.

³⁰⁰Ranier W. Burkart, “History of Research on the Church of the Brethren From the Eighteenth Century to the Present,” BLT. 45:1,2: 2000, 54.

³⁰¹This idea will become clearer as this chapter develops. The key is found in the fact that the Brethren (like other Anabaptist communities) rejects all creeds as confining factors for theological development and biblical interpretation. Therefore, we must ask what are the determining factors for biblical interpretation within the CoB?

other lines. I will argue that particular narratives act as interpretative lenses through which a community perceives reality and from which they discern the will of God for their direction. I will argue that corporate remembrance continues to call the community to remember from whence they came in light of where they are, and the future toward which they are drawn. This corporate remembrance shapes the identity and interpretive lens through which the community perceives. I will support this with Alasdair MacIntyre's argument that all moral reasoning must take place within a narrative tradition in order to be intelligible.³⁰³ Yet as Harry S. Stout argues, interpretation is not simply an exercise of the mind but is essentially affected by the faith commitment of the individual to the particular community.³⁰⁴ This acknowledgment recognizes the overarching role faith tradition plays in the interpretation process. Thus I will conclude that the community, while sharing particular narratives that shape its perception of the community and sharing a common commitment to a particular faith tradition, interprets scripture according to these influences.

Hermeneutical Community?

Inasmuch as I have argued that convictions serve as an interpretative filter, so too do particular narratives in the history of the Brethren movement serve as additional interpretive filters even today. Yet to distinguish the narratives as lying in the "history" of the movement does not adequately express the concept. It is also necessary to determine that the Church of the Brethren belongs to a particular moral tradition. It is essential to acknowledge that tradition is a fundamental component of any community identity even when the community does not recognize the tradition as authoritative in directing the community. The tradition is composed of the shared memories and experiences of the particular community. These shared memories of

³⁰²As re-published in Willard Swartley, ed., "Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," Essays on Biblical Interpretation. (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 21. In the article preceding the one cited above, Walter Klaassen reiterates Yoder's argument saying, "The text can be properly understood only when disciples are gathered together to discover what the Word has to say to their needs and concerns." Klaassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics," Essays on Biblical Interpretation, 10. For a further exposition of this idea, see, John D. Roth, "Community as Conversation: A New Model of Anabaptist Hermeneutics," Essays in Anabaptist Theology. (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 35-50.

³⁰³Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, second edition. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

³⁰⁴Harry S. Stout, "Theological Commitment and American History," TE, spring:1989:47-50.

historical narratives constitute an "interpretive tradition."³⁰⁵ It is crucial to understand that what distinguishes any hermeneutical approach to scripture from any other is essentially the distinctive narrative tradition that comprises the particular community. In other words communities from different faith traditions will interpret scripture differently. For instance a Pentecostal community will interpret scripture differently than a Baptist community, etc.

While Modernity has elevated the role of methodology as the central factor for interpretation, I will argue that for the CoB methodology is only a tool for the interpretative process. The narrative tradition, which comprises the community, plays a greater role in the interpretative process than any one methodological approach. With interpretation, is the presupposed perspective of the reader which affects the comprehension of the object. Thus I am arguing that the perspective of the individual in community essentially affects the interpretation, while methodology is only one means of arriving at the conclusion. This perspective, in essence, is the narrative tradition in which the community exists.

Kenneth J. Archer writes that the Pentecostal narrative is what distinguishes them from other Holiness movements.³⁰⁶ In much the same way, the "distinctive" narrative of the Brethren distinguishes them from other movements (both Anabaptist and Pietist). The narrative around which their identity is shaped also affects to a great extent the way in which this particular community interprets (exegetes) scripture. Archer says that "How . . . any community goes about doing 'exegesis' has as much to do with social location and theological formation as it does with employing a so called neutral-scientific exegetical method."³⁰⁷ The significance here is not methodology, but taking seriously the social location of the individual (community) into consideration. Therefore identity, central narratives, and corporate remembrance are essential.

While identity is based within the corporate experience, Paul Ricoeur suggests that the interpretative identity is formed by and through these shared experiences and the corporate

³⁰⁵Paul Ricoeur, "Structure and Hermeneutics," *The Conflict of Interpretations*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 47ff. Ricoeur illustrates this with Israel's continued call to remember the events of the past, i.e., deliverance from Egypt, faithlessness in the desert, etc. It is from the continued corporate remembrance of these narratives which establish the interpretative tradition of Israel.

³⁰⁶Kenneth J. Archer, "Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century." (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews Dissertation, 2001), 110.

³⁰⁷Ibid.

remembrance of these experiences.³⁰⁸ This means that each time a community is called back to remember a particular narrative, their identity is reshaped by bringing into tension the particular past narrative with the shared present experiences. What the combination of these shared experiences with the past narratives do is in fact become narratives of identity. And it is these particular shared narratives through which we seek to find meaningful existence and by which we make sense of "outside"³⁰⁹ (as well as inside) events, which affect the community. Thus they constitute an interpretative lens.

In a sense it is through this lens that a community of shared memories interprets the world around them. Why is it that narrative is such an important aspect of the interpretative lens? Why not another literary form? Alasdair MacIntyre argues that narrative is the only appropriate form to make sense of life. He says that it is only within narrative communities that moral reasoning takes place.³¹⁰ He explains this, saying, "It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others."³¹¹ MacIntyre's use of narrative is based upon the comparative similarities that Aristotle's theory of narrative (beginning, middle, and end) shares with human existence (birth, life, and death). This not only works regarding individuals but more importantly communities as narratives. He qualifies his argument for narrative communities by necessitating an essential connection between humans and story. He states, "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal."³¹² And he underlines the significance of this statement, saying, "Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words."³¹³ That is to say, "there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including

³⁰⁸Ricoeur, The Conflict of Interpretations, 47ff.

³⁰⁹"Outside" refers to those who do not share the particular narrative for identity, but instead claim a different narrative as their interpretative tradition.

³¹⁰Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, second edition. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 204-225. For further development of his argument concerning moral reasoning as embedded in narrative tradition, see, Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

³¹¹Ibid., 212.

³¹²Ibid., 216

³¹³Ibid.

our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources."³¹⁴

Thus MacIntyre demonstrates the essential necessity of a shared narrative tradition for the existence of any community. He argues that it is only from the perspective of a narrative community that one can make sense of one's existence.³¹⁵ Otherwise life remains unintelligible. This is to say that it is only from within a narrative community that one can make sense of reality. MacIntyre argues against Descartes' individualistic scepticism saying that one can never begin *a priori*.³¹⁶ The very language one uses to communicate presupposes a narrative tradition. Therefore, not only is a narrative tradition an essential component of any community, but it also serves as a means of interpreting events both inside and outside the community.

While this is not the central purpose of his argument, he in essence makes my point for this chapter regarding narrative tradition and identity. The idea here is that people's stories (narratives) are interconnected and they are not isolated individuals devoid of any communal connection. MacIntyre criticizes the western world's emphasis on individualism by demonstrating the interconnectedness that exists between people in community. He expresses this, saying, "I am part of their story as they are part of mine."³¹⁷ He further explains this statement saying, "The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives."³¹⁸ Therefore, as stated previously, one does not exist as an isolated individual, but one's identity is always interconnected with that of others. L. Gregory Jones citing two underlying principles regarding MacIntyre's understanding of narrative (history and human action) says that any interpretative method is bound historically and socially and is "inseparable from the intellectual and social tradition in which it is embodied."³¹⁹ Jones, however, criticizes MacIntyre for his limited emphasis on the community's role.³²⁰ One wonders, however, if this criticism is

³¹⁴Ibid.

³¹⁵Ibid., 216-217.

³¹⁶Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Narrative, and Philosophy of Science," Why Narrative. (Eugene: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 1997), 143-145.

³¹⁷MacIntyre, After Virtue, 218.

³¹⁸Ibid.

³¹⁹L. Gregory Jones, "Alasdair MacIntyre on Narrative, Community, and the Moral Life," Modern Theology. 4:1, (1987), 57.

³²⁰Ibid., 59.

warranted. It appears, from MacIntyre's argument, that one's identity is intimately bound through the vast interconnections of one's story with those in a community of shared presuppositions.³²¹ This then is another sense in which we can say that the CoB is a "hermeneutical community"³²² in that they claim a common narrative tradition as their identity base.³²³ Yet this narrative tradition is not merely an independent narrative, it is also a shared faith tradition based within a particular "metanarrative." It is this sense of "faith tradition," which also contributes to the shaping of the identity narrative of this particular community.

In addition to communities being bound to narrative traditions, it is equally significant that each member of a particular community shares a commitment to that narrative tradition, thus directly affecting how this individual perceives the identity of the narrative tradition of which she is a member. Harry S. Stout wrote regarding one's theological commitment as the primary factor in writing history. While describing historian Perry Miller's approach toward writing history, he notes that Miller found the "mind" to be the central factor for shaping history.³²⁴ In his research, Stout recognized that this emphasis upon the "mind" was probably due to Miller's atheism rather than to methodology.³²⁵ In the process it also became clear that whenever one writes history, "community" is involved in the process. It is in some way necessary for the "observer" (subject) to participate in the community of the "observed" (object). This acknowledges that historical narratives are neither past nor present but simultaneous and that

³²¹In MacIntyre's description on pg. 218 of After Virtue, admittedly he does not use the explicit term "community." However, his description does portray the interconnectedness of individuals contriving the make-up of a community. In his description he expresses not only the interconnectedness but the accountability which exists within a community.

³²²Admittedly, according to this argument all communities are "hermeneutical communities" in as much as their shared memories and the interconnected identities of the individuals making up the community affect the interpretation of their shared reality.

³²³MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Narrative, and Philosophy of Science," Why Narrative, 138-157. MacIntyre argues that moral reasoning and scientific methodology are only intelligible within a "dramatic narrative." He illustrates this by showing how Descartes' epistemological argument of scepticism did not extend *a priori*, but did in fact extend out of a particular tradition (144).

³²⁴Stout, "Theological Commitment and American History," 47-50. See also, John Goldingay, Models for Interpretation of Scripture. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 45. In this work, Goldingay makes a similar argument that a reader approaches a text with both "prior commitments," and a "prior context," thus concluding that a reading is "never exclusively objective."

³²⁵*Ibid.*

one approaches a religious past as either internal or external to the observed community.³²⁶ What this means is that when one writes history, one is either writing from the perspective of inside the “narrated” community or from the perspective of an “outsider.” This in turn shapes how the observed community will be portrayed in the historical narrative and thus interpreted by the individual in community.

However, the significance of Stout’s statements lie not in “participatory history,” nor in the obvious significance of history being both past and present. The magnitude of his argument resides in his discovery that the basic factor of history writing was, for him, not the “mind” but the “faith.”³²⁷ This shift demonstrated that the form of one’s commitment to a particular community plays a central role in how one shapes historical narratives concerning that community. In other words, the writer of history must find a common commitment with the subject matter in order to justifiably portray it. Miller and Morgan both held the mind as the central factor toward shaping history; thus their commitment was not with Puritanism as a religious community but with the Puritans as early Americans. Rather than as according to Miller’s conclusion, the mind playing the central role in writing history, Stout experienced a paradigm shift in his own perspective when he realized that faith became the basic factor for him in writing history.³²⁸ Then instead of interpreting Puritanism as declining and serving as the basis of the American identity, Stout began to understand it more in terms of revival. Therefore, Stout demonstrated that the change of one’s perspective, especially that of faith commitment, does in fact ultimately affect the interpretation of history and thus communities. This then sets the basis of a community, in as much as it is part of a particular “dramatic narrative”, as being an influential “hermeneutical filter.”³²⁹

³²⁶Ibid.

³²⁷Ibid., 55.

³²⁸Ibid. Stout describes the extent to which the “mind” was elevated by Miller and Morgan as follows: “For Miller and Morgan, history is ultimately understood not as a reflection of providence, economic ambition, or political intrigue, but of mind. History is neither God-centred nor environment drive; history is simply what the mind is” (49). Stout then emphasizes his point by quoting Miller, “I have difficulty imagining that anyone can be a historian without realizing that history itself is part of the life of the mind; hence I have been compelled to insist that the mind of man is the basic factor in human history.”

³²⁹Archer, “Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century,” 111. Archer uses this term as he begins his argument suggesting that particular narratives are used by a particular community to shape their interpretation of both a biblical text and faith experiences.

In one sense, Stout finds that there is no connection between one's *theological* commitment and religious history writing. Yet he is convinced that one's commitment to a particular community does affect how one shapes (interprets) historical narratives.³³⁰ Stout recognizes that an individual's commitment to a particular community shapes the telling of history because they share the "common" memory with the historical community to which they are "internally" bound.³³¹ He says, "In the final analysis, point of view directs the script and selects the themes in ways that invariably point back to the ultimate values of the storytellers."³³² This idea is supported by Ronald A. Wells' statement regarding the interpretative lens used by Christians. He says, "The facts of history simply do not speak for themselves; historians speak for them from an interpretative framework of the ideas they already hold."³³³ In addition to "preconceived" ideas, Wells also demonstrates the necessity of the hermeneut's shared experiences in the interpretative process.³³⁴ Therefore it is necessary to acknowledge that interpretation is shaded by the ideas, concepts, and experiences of the hermeneut as part of a community. Archer expresses this notion, saying, "therefore, the narrative tradition of a community becomes an essential part of any hermeneutical strategy, for the making and explaining of meaning is inherently communal."³³⁵ Meaning is never produced in isolation. One processes information within a particular context, with particular presuppositions, with shared narrative experiences of a particular community, and so forth. Thus we can affirm Archer's assertion that all meaning is produced in community.

While the previous chapter distinguished the particular convictions that serve an important purpose as a filter for perception, now we must recognize particular narratives that

³³⁰Stout, "Theological Commitment and American History," 48.

³³¹Ibid.

³³²Ibid., 52.

³³³Ronald A. Wells, History: Through the Eyes of Faith. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 8.

³³⁴Ibid., 7. Wells refers to a criticism of Samuel Eliot Morison (1942) who wrote of Christopher Columbus staggering to the deck when first sighting the land of the New World. The criticism concerned Columbus' "staggering" to the deck. The question was raised as to how Morison knew this staggering occurred. In the end, his conclusion was based upon his own experience of sailing upon a replica of the *Santa Maria*. This denotes the significance of personal experience in the interpretation process.

³³⁵Archer, "Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21st Century," 112.

additionally contribute to the shaping of perception for this particular community.³³⁶ These narratives will stand as the narrative tradition of the CoB. They will comprise both particular biblical narratives (ones which have been emphasized more than others for various reasons) which have shaped and continue to shape the community's identity, as well as historical narratives (shared memories) which continually serve to shape community identity. This notion derives from the idea that within an interpretative framework the identity of the community is formed as they reinterpret their life narratives in terms of the Christ story and link their personal stories with that story (a new identity created through the relationship of the first two) through the connection with the story of the people of God (their new identity within a community framework). To this end the believing community (the CoB in this instance) is transformed into the eschatological community of God. The idea is that the Spirit uses the scriptural focus to initiate in it the ability to view their own situations in the light of God's promised future. It is necessary to understand that there is a dialectic relationship that occurs here. It occurs between what the community sees as the past (promises of God, biblical events, their own past faith experiences), the present life of the community (the experiences of a Spirit led life), and the future expectation (the anticipation of God's promises fulfilled, hope). It is a complex and multifaceted relationship but it is the essential idea of a "hermeneutical community."

The Narrative Identity of the Brethren

While there are apparent convictions to which the community holds and which in turn shape how an individual in community interprets scripture, particular narratives also contribute to the interpretative lens through which the individual (in community) reads scripture. These narratives which serve as essential components for the community's identity (even as the Exodus serves as a central narrative component for the Israelites' identity) are inclusive of both particular scriptural narratives as well as historical narratives regarding the seminal formation of the particular community and of ongoing significant events experienced in time. If this is so,

³³⁶ It is not insignificant to note that the Brethren *Gemeinde* has no written creed or standard of belief other than the New Testament. Thus there are no set means or norms for biblical interpretation. Herein lies the significance of the "hermeneutical community." While other faith traditions rely upon particular creeds or statements of faith to guide biblical interpretation, the Brethren have no such creed other than the New Testament. Nevertheless, the CoB does have controlling factors for their interpretative process. The point here is that the hermeneutical perspective of the CoB is the primary controlling element for their biblical interpretation.

then one can say that central narratives exist that form both the identity of the CoB³³⁷ as well as essentially affect their interpretation of scripture. Thus we must now ask the question, "what narrative(s) constitute the central narratives of the CoB?"

Central Biblical Narratives

It is not insignificant that prior to the formation of the Early Brethren *Gemeinde*, the primary historical accounts testify that the formation was preceded by earnest Bible study.³³⁸ Thus it can be presumed that the central narratives of the CoB are firmly grounded within the scriptural text. Due to their emphasis on Christ,³³⁹ the New Testament was (is) their primary source for instruction as well as authority.³⁴⁰ Therefore, it is not scripture in general that holds supreme authority,³⁴¹ but the New Testament and specifically the Gospel narratives in the New Testament. In his significant sociological study of the Brethren, Carl F. Bowman provides an

³³⁷I am purposefully treating the CoB (Church of the Brethren) as a distinctive community due to obvious differences between them and other branches of the Brethren faith tradition. It is presupposed that the central narratives are the sources of primary (or seminal) convictions which involuntarily guide the interpretation process. This is in essence the notion of a hermeneutical lens as used in this thesis.

³³⁸Donald Durnbaugh records Alexander Mack Jr.'s recorded account of the event which is based upon papers left by his father (Alexander Mack) and Peter Becker. European Origins of the Brethren. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1958), 120.

³³⁹Early sources demonstrate that from the beginning the Brethren fellowship embraced a Christ-centred faith. Alexander Mack exhorted his brothers and sisters, "to love thy God, who created thee, and Jesus Christ, who redeemed thee with his precious blood, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, yea above all things in the world . . ." Alexander Mack, A Short and Plain View of the Outward Yet Sacred Rites and Ordinances of the House of God as Commanded by the True Steward, Jesus Christ, and Left on Record in His Last Will and Testament; Also Ground Searching Questions Answered by the Author, Alexander Mack. (Ashland: Century Printing, 1939), 69.

³⁴⁰The belief of the authority of scripture is evidenced in the treatise Alexander Mack Sr. wrote regarding the "rights and ordinances" of the faith. In them he refers to the Pietists when he says, "They think that they have achieved more than the apostles. Moreover, they no longer take counsel from the writings of the apostles." Mack, The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack, 82.

³⁴¹By no means do the Brethren diminish the significance of the Old Testament. However, because they see the fulfilment of the OT in the person of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament, ultimate authority for faith and practice is found in the NT. Richard Bauckham provides an excellent description of the Old Testament's application for our political life in The Bible in Politics. (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989), 6-7. Relying upon 2 Tim. 3:16, he says that the OT cannot be *instruction* for us, but it is certainly *instructive*. While it was not his intention, his description of the relationship between the testaments reflects closely how Brethren would understand it. Essentially the Brethren affirm that the NT is prefigured in the OT and that the OT must be interpreted through the NT.

excellent summation of the Brethren's hierarchy of scripture:

This Christ-centeredness prioritized their reading of Scripture. The New Testament, containing a new covenant between God and his people, was viewed as a more complete revelation of God's will than the Old (even though the Brethren saw no radical discontinuity between the two). Within the New Testament itself, the Brethren accentuated the Gospels and the teachings of Jesus more than the Pauline Epistles or the Book of Revelation. In fact, the Sermon on the Mount was quoted so frequently that it could be considered the Brethren's charter. The Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles were next in importance because they revealed the teachings and practices of the primitive church.³⁴²

From this we can surmise that the scriptural narratives which contribute to the central narratives of the CoB are specifically Gospel narratives. It has formerly been demonstrated in the process of this study that particular texts affected conviction to the extent that the "original eight" made the decision and commitment to be baptized and form a fellowship. It was their desire to conform themselves to the scriptures and to recover primitive Christianity. In doing this these texts (primarily New Testament narratives) became part of the central narrative that makes up the perspective of this fellowship. Yet, how is it that we can identify particular biblical narratives as being or becoming "central narratives" of this particular community? The answer lies in the extent and nature of the commitment to conform to those biblical narratives. If one commits one's self to the extent of being willing to suffer for that commitment, a significant value is placed upon that particular narrative. It no longer exists as an external entity, but becomes part of one's own identity. An example of this can be found in the lives of the seven brethren who were imprisoned for their faith in 1717.³⁴³

As can be surmised by the very nature of the Brethren fellowship as described thus far, baptism and baptism narratives serve as the formative narratives for this fellowship. In the first Brethren tract circulated in the summer of 1708, the author, known only as "one of the first eight," wrote an apologetic and invitation for believer baptism. The basis of the first eight's

³⁴²Carl F. Bowman, Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a Peculiar People. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 29.

³⁴³Durnbaugh, European Origins of the Brethren, 241ff. Durnbaugh provides William Grahe's stirring firsthand account of the seven brethren's ordeal in the Düsseldorf and Jülich prisons. One of the striking aspects of the account is the extent of their commitment to their convictions as well as to a radical form of discipleship. In the process of maintaining their commitment to conform with scripture under the penalty of imprisonment, they interpreted their imprisonment as a consequence of practising a pure Christian faith. Due to their conviction the scriptures became a central part of their identity.

convictions was anchored in a desire to obediently follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.³⁴⁴

There is an underlying radical commitment which is required by those willing to follow. This coincides with Hochmann's letter to George Grebe and Alexander Mack, two of the "original eight," before their decision to form the *Gemeinde* was made. In the letter Hochmann warns the eight of the immediate dangers. He says, "From such actions at the present time will inevitably follow nothing but the cross and misery, as the anti-Christ will still rage against the members of Jesus Christ."³⁴⁵ He thus adds, "One must, therefore, count the cost, if one will follow after the Lord Jesus in all the trials which will certainly follow from this."³⁴⁶ From this one recognizes the source of the Brethren's emphasis upon commitment and obedience. While the subject matter of the narratives was certainly baptism, the spirit behind it was the call to complete conformity and submission to the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ. It is from this that the commands of Jesus and the commands found within the New Testament were elevated. Not only were they to conform to the life of Jesus Christ as found in the Gospels, but they were also to submit themselves to the commandments of the New Testament. Therefore particular gospel narratives such as the "Sermon on the Mount" held significant value as their central narratives because of the very nature of its teachings.

The Past and the Present

In addition to the gospel narratives and the commands of the New Testament, particular narrative events occurring within the Brethren community serve as central narratives which continue to shape the identity of the Brethren and form their perceptive lens. These narratives, which have been referred to as "historical narratives" or "shared memories," begin with the initial events in Schwarzenau, Germany, and the ongoing events which have contributed significantly to the Brethren *Gemeinde* as it exists today.

In order for this study to offer an accurate portrayal of the CoB hermeneutical

³⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 115. From the beginning of the tract to the end the tone of the epistle is one of seeking obedience to the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ. Illustrating this are the author's words, "If we begin in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus to live according to his commandments . . ." (119). This, however, is only one such instance. Throughout the tract reference is continually made regarding obedience to Christ.

³⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 113.

³⁴⁶*Ibid.*

perspective, it must recognize the development of the community from where it began to where it now stands and particularly the most significant events that have affected change within the fellowship and which have shaped how the fellowship has interpreted that change.³⁴⁷ It is my premise that these changes and the form of these changes both affect how the community interprets scripture as well as how scripture has formed (or reformed) the community as it stands in a dialectic relationship with its environment.

In his work, Brethren Society, Carl Bowman outlines the peculiar beliefs of the Brethren and how they have both changed and have been reinterpreted over time.³⁴⁸ Bowman explains in this sociological study that when orthodoxies change the "cultural transformation typically preserves a balance between change and continuity."³⁴⁹ He further explains that when dramatic changes occur it becomes vital for the faith community that a perception of faithfulness is preserved.³⁵⁰ In other words as the community changes or is faced with faith challenges they reinterpret their belief statements (while the statements themselves remain the same) in order to maintain continuity with their environment and still preserve their identity. Bowman calls this reinterpretation *symbolic bridging*, when the "treasured symbols remained the same even though their moral content (meaning) was fundamentally altered."³⁵¹ Yet how does the community reinterpret traditional convictions while avoiding moral relativity in a postmodern world? These reinterpretations of the Brethren's symbols (basic beliefs) serve as evidence as to what significant events have occurred that warranted such dramatic reinterpretation of scripture and doctrine. These historical narratives serve as central narratives which continually form and reform the interpretative lens of the CoB community. The ability to avoid the moral relativity of western culture is found in the community's continued embrace of scripture while

³⁴⁷Of particular interest here is how the fellowship has altered its scriptural interpretation in order to facilitate the change without losing sight of their identity.

³⁴⁸Bowman's findings have been characterized as "path-breaking interpretations" (Durnbaugh in "Bibliographical Note for Publications in the 1980's and 1990's," BLT, 45:2000:1&2:75). His work does a thorough job of showing the development of Brethren beliefs as being a "plain people" into a more Protestant mainline denomination. Of particular interest in this study is Bowman's observation of how the Brethren reinterpreted their old convictions.

³⁴⁹Bowman, Brethren Society, 344. This study uses the term "core convictions" synonymously to Bowman's term "treasured symbol."

³⁵⁰Ibid.

³⁵¹Ibid.

seeking to reach out to the world. While a diverse understanding surely remains in the community as to what extent scripture is authoritative, there still exists a commitment to biblical study with the hope of renewal.³⁵²

Bowman observes seven essential reinterpretations of core convictions which have occurred over the last two centuries. The seven are as follows: nonconformity, nonresistance, freedom of conscience, no force in religion, noncredalism, obedience, and Christian unity. Over particular periods of time each of these core convictions became issues within the fellowship and as the issue arose the community reinterpreted the texts which had led the fellowship originally to their convictions. However, in the process of the reinterpretation of the scriptures, the community arrived at different understandings of the texts. Yet if the same Spirit led the fellowship to their original convictions, then how is it that the Spirit brought the community to a different understanding of the same scriptural texts? One explanation can answer for this interpretative change. The community, particularly the highly educated church leaders, experienced a change in perspective.³⁵³ As a result of this changed perspective, the context of the community also changed. Rather than being sectarian holding to the old practices which tightly constrained moral behaviour, the community and its leaders embraced the outreach ministries (evangelism, missions). This outward turn blurred the church/world distinction.³⁵⁴ No longer were they an introverted community but they began to reach out beyond denominational boundaries. Bowman and other historians have described the sociological changes in the history of the Brethren as taking place during times when the fellowship was affected by outside influences. The more the *Gemeinde* became involved in the world, the more it was influenced

³⁵²The 1979 annual conference minutes illustrate the lack of continuity regarding biblical authority. Yet even in the midst of the community's diversity on this issue, a clear commitment to scripture and its significance is demonstrated in the following conclusion: "In our diversity we are not fully agreed on all that it means for Brethren to respond faithfully to the message of the Bible in our day. We are agreed, however, on the need for a continuing dialogue with and about scripture that we might experience biblical renewal in our midst" (564).

³⁵³*Ibid.*, 376. Regarding why the Brethren symbols were reinterpreted Bowman states, "These leaders simply read the pages of Brethren history from the perspective of their missionary and, later, ecumenical interests, latching naturally upon whatever blended with their evolving moral outlook."

³⁵⁴Brethren always believed that they practised a true and pure faith unlike the worldly Protestant denominations.

by it and conforming to it.³⁵⁵

Bowman begins with the core conviction of "nonconformity." He explains that the doctrine of nonconformity was always both a "behavioral boundary" as well as a "moral principle."³⁵⁶ However, by the late nineteenth century it had been reduced to a specific behavioural code. Application always being paramount in Brethren scriptural interpretation they interpreted the abstract principle by setting up a series of concrete behaviours. Yet as the fellowship expanded and more members entered the academy, they began to question the doctrine of "nonconformity." They began wondering how they would relate to the world.³⁵⁷ Bowman says that the result was reinterpretation of the doctrine. They did this by finding the underlying principle of the doctrine.³⁵⁸ Thus the community reinterpreted the doctrine of "nonconformity" as the "simple life doctrine."³⁵⁹ In essence they found the underlying principle of their behavioural practices to be simple living.³⁶⁰ But what event caused the community to reinterpret such a core conviction? Durnbaugh describes the social milieu within the church as

³⁵⁵In the process of Bowman's discussion of the Brethren's doctrinal development, an underlying development becomes obvious. As the Brethren were more influenced by the world through higher education, joint missionary endeavors, and evangelism, a symptom of western culture infected the once sectarian Brethren *Gemeinde*, individualism. In the following section as I survey Bowman's observations seeking the effects of individualism will become apparent.

³⁵⁶*ibid.*

³⁵⁷Durnbaugh argues that this was an underlying question of the controversy which split the church in the 1880's. He also points to their question as to how they were to win converts (evangelize) when they held to such stringent separatist ways. Fruit of the Vine. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1997), 292.

³⁵⁸In one sense this illustrates the effects of modernity upon the Brethren *Gemeinde* as the educated leaders apply historical-critical principles of methodology [see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., Introduction to Biblical Interpretation. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 174ff.] to both scriptural interpretation and doctrinal development. On the other hand it also demonstrates the fellowships acknowledgment of the need to adjust its practices in order to be relevant to the world it was seeking to reach.

³⁵⁹Bowman, Brethren Society, 345.

³⁶⁰This discovery of the underlying principle is based upon the notion that along the way the Brethren *Gemeinde* forgot their understanding of the principle underlying their doctrine because of their overemphasis of the behavioural practices. Bowman additionally recognizes that in the process of defending and redefining their tradition against Modernity's rational attacks, the tradition and its beliefs and practices ultimately changed (342). Yet the direct effects of modernity upon the *Gemeinde* is illustrated in their search for an underlying principle. It is curious that rather than turning to Jesus Christ as the authoritative model, they reinterpreted the old doctrine conforming more to mainline Protestantism.

a power struggle between three factions within the fellowship.³⁶¹ On the one hand was the group who argued for maintaining the Old Order, at the other end was a group called the Progressives who argued for church reform which included adopting some of the practices of mainline denominations: 1) training for ministers and other leaders at schools of higher education; 2) regular financial support for ministers; 3) Sunday schools for all age levels; 4) revival or "protracted" meetings; 5) evangelism through organized home missions and foreign missions; 6) reform in the method of holding Annual Meetings, including verbatim reports of their transactions; 7) relaxation of the strict and uniform dress code, while avoiding extravagant fashion.³⁶² In between these two groups was a third (the majority) who were considered the conservatives. This group argued for moderation while continuing to resist these changes. This struggle ultimately ended in a three way division of the *Gemeinde*.

However, is this event, even though it was vitally significant in aiming the future direction of the fellowship, to be considered a central historical narrative for the CoB? Another obvious question arises here: the 2001 annual conference received a call for forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation from one of the above factions (the Brethren Church). When the question of how annual conference was to respond, it became conspicuously clear that few recalled the split and its causes and thus called for a study. So if the historical narrative is not remembered, can it be considered a central narrative affecting the hermeneutical perspective of the community? The point is that while the "narrative conviction" is derived from the historical narrative, it cannot be separated from it. While the narrative itself may not be completely remembered, the conviction derived from the narrative, whether or not it has been reinterpreted, is remembered and ingrained in the perspective of the individual within the particular community.³⁶³ Therefore while the community may not recall the specifics of the core narrative, the moral convictions derived from the narrative are continually recalled and employed in the hermeneutical perspective. Moreover, simply because the community cannot recall off-hand

³⁶¹Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1997), 292. Durnbaugh distinguishes the three factions as "Progressives," the "Old Orders," and the "Conservatives." He describes this power struggle in terms of which faction would control the future direction of the fellowship.

³⁶²*Ibid.*, 304.

³⁶³In much the same way MacIntyre argues that one cannot separate behaviours from intentions and intentions from settings, moral convictions derived from a particular narrative cannot be separated from the narrative itself. The conviction is not only a byproduct of the narrative but also an essential element of the narrative as ongoing. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 206.

the particular narrative does not lessen the importance of the narrative for the community. The narrative is told and retold even if only by historians. Thus the narrative conviction (church symbol as Bowman refers to it) has ongoing effects upon the community, even as it is continually reinterpreted.

Likewise, each of the other six church symbols, as listed by Bowman, were reinterpreted over a period of time and within particular contexts, thus developing into narrative convictions (or conviction derived from a narrative context). Nonresistance was reinterpreted into the "Peace Position," reflecting another change in perspective. According to Bowman, the Brethren were always opposed to fighting. However, the conviction of nonresistance was tightly bound to the doctrine of "nonconformity."³⁶⁴ The Early Brethren distinguished themselves from other forms of Christianity. They considered themselves "true Christians, following Christ's model on the cross," while other forms were impure and worldly.³⁶⁵ Nevertheless, a transformation took place in the community. Their perspective began to change radically. Bowman gives the following explanation:

Between the Civil War and World War I, the Church of the Brethren was transformed from a small body that backed up its peculiar morality with church discipline to a large, diversified group of missionary-minded Protestants who were hesitant to enforce church principles with "legalistic" methods. Thus, when a universal draft was implemented during World War I, the church was caught off-guard, unprepared to define the practical implications of Dunker nonresistance for a new era of external cooperation and deepened nationalistic sentiment. The downplaying of the once-clear boundary between Brethren and the World resulted in two simultaneous developments regarding war and peace: (1) the preservation of church "purity" regarding the rejection of force was increasingly problematic, and (2) the church became increasingly concerned about the use of force in the broader society.³⁶⁶

Therefore once again we find the Brethren struggling with the tension of their own identity and convictions and the challenges brought by their increasing presence and participation in the world. Thus the narrative surrounding this essential reinterpretation is the context of war and the *Gemeinde's* response to it. In the process of this tension was another reinterpretation

³⁶⁴Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 349.

³⁶⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 350. Bowman summarizes this description with an interesting metaphor. He says, "Quite simply, traditional nonresistance had required Brethren to wash the dirt of the world's streets from their feet. Yet now that they were spending more time in those streets, they worried less about washing and more about clean streets" (350).

making conspicuous the changed perspective of the community. Instead of a passive nonresistance which isolated itself from the events of the world, this Brethren doctrine was reinterpreted as an evangelistic proclamation that sought to actively work toward peace in worldly society. Essentially, this evangelistic reinterpretation demonstrates the role of "perspective" in the interpretation process by the application of the "mission-oriented" perspective to the interpretation of the core conviction. Even though it is essentially a doctrinal interpretation, this new perspective ultimately affects Brethren biblical interpretation in a like manner.³⁶⁷

The third symbol, which Bowman discusses involves the "Freedom of Conscience." The idea of "Freedom of Conscience" is that an individual is free to "follow Christ even when it is not popular."³⁶⁸ Bowman additionally explains that this originally was by no means a licence to "interpret Christ's commands according to the whims of their own conscience."³⁶⁹ While some individual discernment was allowed it was never on basic areas of doctrine. He says, "Until the early twentieth century, they had generally understood that Christian obedience placed constraints upon personal freedom of church members."³⁷⁰ "Freedom of Conscience" did not consist of the notion of one's conscience being convicted independently of the *Gemeinde*. Autonomy was a foreign concept.

However, by the 1940s the Brethren were faced with another world war. During WWII the Brethren experienced a radical change in that the vast majority of drafted Brethren entered straight military service rather than seeking alternative service or remaining conscientious

³⁶⁷For example, Virginia Wiles' exegetical study of Romans provides an interpretation of Paul's use of "righteousness" and "justification" in which the Brethren conviction of the "Peace position" shapes the interpretation. In her study she arrives at an interpretation of the Greek word δικαιοσύνη, which has traditionally been translated righteousness and justification. In this study she poses the question as to what the righteousness of God is. She then argues that "one of the gravest misunderstandings about the phrase" is that it refers to moral purity. She then states that the God of Israel is not concerned primarily with moral purity but that he seeks peace. This idea is based upon her understanding that righteousness is a descriptive word about God's work for *shalom* in the world. She specifically says, "This word relates to God's passionate pursuit of peace in the world. Thus, to be justified means to become a partner with God in God's pursuit of peace." Partners in Peace: God's Vision of Shalom in the Book of Romans. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 2001), 7-8.

³⁶⁸Bowman, Brethren Society, 353-354.

³⁶⁹Ibid., 354.

³⁷⁰Ibid. Bowman also notes that "Freedom of Conscience" never included dissent on matters of doctrine.

objectors.³⁷¹ This anomaly created a quandary of sorts as to how the *Gemeinde* should treat these individual choices. The decision of the *Gemeinde* was one of toleration and acceptance as they allowed the individuals to follow their conscience rather than to force conformity through church discipline. This decision "displaced the church as the final custodian of personal behavior."³⁷² Thus the doctrine of "Freedom of Conscience" was reinterpreted from meaning "individual freedom to follow Christ" to a new doctrine which encourages individuals to follow their conscience.³⁷³ While Bowman does not make any specific connection between this reinterpretation and the *Gemeinde's* conviction of "Christian Unity," in the process of observing the interpretation one can argue that this core conviction of unity probably played a key role in the end. This is especially true in light of the former schisms, which occurred about sixty years previously and recognizing the effects which were still felt.

The fourth symbol Bowman discusses is "No Force in Religion." This doctrine primarily meant that the Government could not force an individual to join nor prevent them from joining the church of their choice.³⁷⁴ Essentially this doctrine denied any government authority in matters of church membership. Obviously this is rooted deep within the Radical Reformation and those who experienced forced baptism and other forms of religious coercion. Therefore it was never the intention of this doctrine to usurp church authority in matters of discipline within the fellowship. However, as Bowman shows, this doctrine was redefined to mean that the church should not force anyone to leave the church (such as application of the Ban). The key member heading this reinterpretation was Martin G. Brumbaugh who insisted that in excommunication the Brethren were "adopting the very force tactics that early Brethren had struggled to overcome."³⁷⁵

Once again the predominant message emphasized was one of toleration. Therefore, "No Force

³⁷¹Rufus D. Bowman, as cited in Carl F. Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 352.

³⁷²Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 355.

³⁷³While Bowman states that the Brethren reinterpreted this conviction to mean that an individual has the freedom to follow one's conscience, it was and has been assumed that the conscience was led by the Spirit (or inner light). The *Gemeinde* shifted from holding the scriptural interpretations (scriptural based convictions) as authoritative and began allowing the possibility of new interpretations. This new openness allowed the continual transformation of the community. The question here arises as to the constraining factors which shape the community's hermeneutics.

³⁷⁴*ibid.*, 356.

³⁷⁵*ibid.*

in Religion" was reinterpreted to elevate individual freedom over against church discipline. Again it is not surprising that this reinterpretation began so closely following the schism of the 1880s.³⁷⁶

"Noncreedalism," originally meaning that nothing was to be added or removed from Scripture, was reinterpreted as the present idea that the Bible must be interpreted individually without any outside interference.³⁷⁷ Bowman explains that noncreedalism was "a protest against scholastic dogma and against confessions that seemed divorced from everyday living."³⁷⁸ Briefly stated, noncreedalism was understood to be nothing more than the *Gemeinde's* proclamation, "no creed but the New Testament." Being firmly rooted in the Radical Reformation this doctrine was based upon the interpretation of the faith experience during the Reformation which concluded that creeds were a source of oppression and coercion upon members of society to conform to human-made belief systems. Because of this, the Early Brethren insisted upon no creed but the New Testament.

Much the same as the other church symbols, "noncreedalism" was reinterpreted. Bowman states that Brethren noncreedalism has come to mean for most Brethren that "neither Annual Conference nor their local congregations should impose specific standards of faith or practice upon the membership."³⁷⁹ Bowman explains that this new interpretation is nothing more than a change in emphasis upon the old statement, "no creed but the New Testament." He says that rather than suggesting members should follow the New Testament instead of a formal written creed, the new interpretation suggests that the church should not interfere with private interpretations. Thus instead of "but the New Testament" being emphasized, now the emphasis is simply "no creed."³⁸⁰ However, it seems that even as though this reinterpretation

³⁷⁶Martin Grove Brumbaugh's article "The Conditions in Germany about 1708," Two Centuries of the Church of the Brethren, was published in 1908 merely 24 years removed.

³⁷⁷Bowman, Brethren Society, 357-358.

³⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 357.

³⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 358.

³⁸⁰*Ibid.* In this observation of the doctrinal reinterpretation, Bowman offers no particular narrative setting in which this process took place. In fact unlike the other observations he provides no particular church leader who played a significant role in the reinterpretation. One is left assuming that it was almost a "natural" development over time considering how the other doctrines were reinterpreted. However, given the time frame it is easy to propose that this reinterpretation may have been the combined effect of the schism of the 1880's as well as the ongoing effects of the other reinterpretations

contradicts the idea of a hermeneutical community. Even as Yoder envisioned the ideal of Anabaptists gathering in community to study the scriptures and discuss the interpretations, so it seems that this reinterpreted conviction disallows the conversation and authoritative outcome of the hermeneutical community.³⁸¹ If we understand the church as the community, then we especially find that this reinterpretation moves closer to the Radical Pietism that the Early Brethren left.

As the *Gemeinde* continued on its path to tolerance and acceptance, Bowman also shows that it reinterpreted the doctrine of obedience. Originally this doctrine meant that the members were to submit themselves to obeying the "simple commandments of Jesus Christ."³⁸² For Brethren, obedience was essential for true faith. Bowman says, "early Brethren held that obedience was the flower of true faith."³⁸³ Obedience was so important for the *Gemeinde* that they used Matthew 18:17 as a means of holding members accountable.³⁸⁴ However, as the Brethren had approached the issue of those who willingly entered military service during WWII with tolerance and acceptance emphasizing the reinterpretations of freedom of conscience and no force in religion, the doctrine of obedience became less emphasized until its reinterpretation at the 1976 annual conference. This reinterpretation changed terminology and definitions regarding the doctrine of "obedience." The paper shows some of this reinterpretation in the following excerpt:

We have decided to use the words *discipleship* and *reconciliation* instead of

as the *Gemeinde* sought to cope as a peace church during two world wars. In addition to these another probable affecting factor was the ever increasing individualism within the *Gemeinde* and the continued effects of the outside world upon the community.

³⁸¹Yoder, "Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," 20-21.

³⁸²This is based upon statements by D.L. Miller as cited by Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 359.

³⁸³*Ibid.*, 358.

³⁸⁴As Bowman states, 1937 was the last time the church would pass a paper regarding church discipline while citing Matthew 18:17. This text says, "If that person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. If the church decides you are right but the other person won't accept it, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector" (NLT). Thus such disobedience would result in disowning the individual. There is no better illustration of the significance of this Early Brethren belief than from the words of Alexander Mack. In "Rights and Ordinances," he uses strong purity language as he argues that an obvious sinner should not be allowed in the church. He says, "Just as they have been excluded from the kingdom of God because of their sins, so must they also be excluded for the church of the Lord." William Eberly, ed., *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1991), 63-65.

counseling and *discipline*. The word discipline carries widely varying meanings and has become associated frequently with negative, unloving, and punitive overtones. *Counseling*, as traditionally used in this context, often implies "pressuring" and "advice giving" rather than the way the word is understood professionally. *Discipleship* and *reconciliation*, biblical and positive words, are consistent with our heritage.³⁸⁵

Thus, annual conference adopted a redefined polity regarding the doctrine of obedience by means of reinterpreting the scriptural passages such as Matthew 18:17.³⁸⁶ So instead of a stringent practice which held members closely accountable through strict church discipline which included "disownings," the CoB reinterpreted the doctrine using euphemistic terms carrying more positive connotations. The reinterpretation includes the two primary terms discipleship (defined as commitment, moral living, accountability, and ministry) and reconciliation.³⁸⁷ Bowman describes the change as a repackaging of the term obedience as "commitment' or 'discipleship.'"³⁸⁸ He says, "Most of the symbols and moral commitments that radiated from the traditional obedience emphasis have disappeared entirely from Brethren discourse."³⁸⁹ This reinterpretation of the old doctrine reflected the position of the fellowship emphasizing tolerance and acceptance.

The final reinterpretation, which makes up the new hermeneutical perspective of the CoB, concerns their conviction of Christian unity. Early Brethren believed strongly that commitment to "spiritual" and "practical" unity was essential for the *Gemeinde*.³⁹⁰ From their perspective, as being the only pure Christian faith, unity was aimed at their fellowship. Unity not only took the form of relationship, but also played out in how they worshipped and lived

³⁸⁵190th Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Minutes: Wichita, Kansas. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1976), 200.

³⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 202. The reinterpretation of this passage demonstrates the radical change of the *Gemeinde*. The paper given at the 1976 annual conference includes the following reinterpretation. "The biblical teaching of Matthew 18, traditionally practiced in the Church of the Brethren, can be reinterpreted. It can be insensitively and hastily employed. However, when verse seventeen, '... let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector' (RSV), is understood within the context of the *total* chapter, it reflects the openness and unending compassion of Jesus. Gentiles and tax collectors as well as other rejected persons were the focus of his compassion and forgiveness (Matt. 9:9; 21:28-32; Luke 5:28-32; 7:34-50; 15:3-32; 18:9-14; 19:1-10; and John 4:7-26; 8:3-11)."

³⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 200.

³⁸⁸Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 360.

³⁸⁹*Ibid.*

³⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 361.

together. Unity was applied as "uniform." Brethren from near and far were to dress alike and worship alike. Bowman describes the theme of unity as being "closely intertwined with those of self-denial, discipline, and faithfulness to ancient and primitive order."³⁹¹ Yet these terms and their connotations did not fit the new emerging CoB perspective. Thus as the *Gemeinde* continued to reinterpret their faith and practice as they struggled with the dialectical problem of identity (who we were, who we are, who we will be) and their increased focus on the outside world.

Some Observations and Challenges

At this point some brief observations must be made regarding the development of the Brethren *Gemeinde* and the reinterpretation of their doctrines. As one can recognize, little has been said about the narratives surrounding the doctrinal reinterpretations. Admittedly, Bowman's focus was sociological and anthropological. However, it is vital to acknowledge the events surrounding these reinterpretations because it is the narratives and the nature of the narratives that affect the interpretative community. What were some of the causal factors of these reinterpretations? What are some of the implications of increased individualism and outside influence upon the development of the *Gemeinde*? What shared experiences of the *Gemeinde* influenced the direction of these interpretations? It has been consistently held in this study that shared memories (historical narratives) contribute to a community's interpretation. The first observation is that in the span of the fellowship's existence, their shared experience was often tumultuous. Furthermore, when the fellowship was not experiencing conflict and division within itself, it was facing the wars of society. Therefore, one must not overlook the role that conflicts and wars have played in contributing to the interpretation and reinterpretation of the Brethren identity.

As a result of these shared experiences, we observe an emphasis of "unity" emerging within the fellowship. While neither Bowman nor Durnbaugh make any direct connection between the church schisms and the reinterpretations, I would argue that having suffered the trauma of schism and its effects the Brethren sought more lenient ways of confronting their growing diversity considering their changed hermeneutical perspective.³⁹² The reinterpretation

³⁹¹Ibid.

³⁹²Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 390. Durnbaugh makes no causal statements regarding the reinterpretation of this doctrine. He simply records its occurrence.

of the doctrine of "freedom of conscience" shows the reluctance of the *Gemeinde* to assert authoritatively on doctrinal issues. This would suggest an attempt at avoiding further alienation of members within the community as well as alleviating annual conference's role of dictating doctrinal practices to the *Gemeinde*. This means that the unity of the body was elevated over the uniformity of the fellowship.

Secondly, in the midst of the new doctrinal understandings there is an apparent hesitancy to judge. This is illustrated in each of the reinterpretations. As a result diversity within the fellowship rapidly increased. Bowman describes the reinterpretation of "freedom of conscience" as being "far removed from the historic Brethren insistence upon united obedience to the mind of Christ."³⁹³ However, one must question exactly how far a move the Brethren made and whether or not they sought to conform to the mind of Christ. Does the new understanding exclude "obedience to the mind of Christ?" At the 193rd annual conference, the Brethren received a paper from a committee regarding biblical inspiration and authority. The paper states the following:

However, Christian freedom does not imply an unchecked individualism. Our Anabaptist heritage teaches that no one enters the kingdom apart from one's brothers and sisters. It is within the community of believers and for their upbuilding that the Spirit is given, and those who walk in the Spirit are called on to walk toward ". . . being in full accord and of one mind . . . (and are instructed) . . . to have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus."³⁹⁴

In this statement the annual conference affirmed the need to conform oneself to the mind of Christ. In the following paragraph they went on to explain that this obedience is fulfilled when they love one another even as Christ loves them.³⁹⁵ Therefore, while Bowman shows concern for an overemphasis on acceptance and toleration within the fellowship, it is assumed that the Holy Spirit is guiding the community's interpretation of scripture. However, it is equally clear that as the Brethren continued to reach out an increased individualism emerged within the community.

Thirdly, with the increased affirmation of the individual and the individual's freedoms, the identity of the community becomes ambiguous. As individualism is continually emphasized so

³⁹³Bowman, *Brethren Society*, 356.

³⁹⁴193rd Church of the Brethren Annual Conference; Seattle, Washington. (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1979), 563-564.

³⁹⁵They make their statement by quoting John 13:34-35.

the identity of the individual becomes more autonomous, thus creating a separation of the individual identity from the identity of the community. Even as the individual continues to share the memories of the community, those shared memories become less significant for the formation of the individual. With individualism comes a separation in community. As the individual becomes more distinct, the more ambiguous the identity of the community becomes. Increased individualism makes more conspicuous diversity in the community, thus overlooking similarities and emphasizing differences. Therefore, one of the results of increased individualism within the Brethren community is an identity crisis. This is not to say that the Brethren have forgotten who they were, only that at present their identity is becoming more ambiguous. Perhaps it is this which Bowman fears as the Brethren not only become more tolerant and accepting but that they are also becoming more individualistic and thus losing their identity as Brethren (a peculiar people). This serves as a particular challenge for the community as it attempts to be salt to society in the 21st century.

The wider implications of the outside influence and increased individualism are problematic in several ways. As has been shown through Bowman's argument, the church and its reading and reinterpretation of its own narrative have been increasingly influenced by the wider "narrative" of American modernity. In essence this is a fundamental change in the church's hermeneutical practice and is thus itself a contradiction in the story of the *Gemeinde*. Therefore, we must begin re-asking questions such as, "What will be the distinctive witness for the CoB over the next century?" For Anabaptists in general the key to their witness is found in Christian ethics. Their proclamation is the very act of being a distinct *community*.³⁹⁶ The origins of the CoB in the Radical Reformation require the presence of critical factors within the hermeneutic sufficient to challenge and reform the fellowship according to scripture. Thus the *Gemeinde* must return to scripture. This then raises the hermeneutical question as to what hermeneutical factor (or symbol) within the CoB will challenge and reform the current trends in the church? If the CoB continues the trend of increased individualism, what will be its witness? Dale Brown states in his article that is difficult for twentieth century believers to empathize with

³⁹⁶Craig Carter writes concerning the theology and social ethics of John Howard Yoder. In it he says "Yoder's entire concept of social ethics is built upon the premise that Jesus called the Christian community into being in order that it might be a continuing witness to him on earth and that, in order for that witness to be clear, it had to be a *community*." Craig Carter, *The Politics of the Cross*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 82-83. Yoder has often been controversial with his criticisms of the Anabaptist community. However, in this comparison of his work to that of his teacher, Karl Barth, we find a helpful description and explanation of his social ethics.

the symbolic nature of believer's baptism as a participation in a "rejection of societal norms and a strong identification with a persecuted counter-culture community."³⁹⁷ With this being rightly stated, it becomes evident that the Brethren need to find another symbol from within their tradition that challenges current trends. I would suggest that an appropriate symbol for the twenty-first century is the Brethren love feast, simply because of its strong communal themes. Essentially, the love feast symbolizes conjunction of loving God and loving one's neighbour.³⁹⁸

Finally, noncredalism stands as the most significant factor for Brethren hermeneutics. Creeds have traditionally (in both mainline denominations and Catholicism) served as boundaries for theological development and biblical interpretation. Because the Brethren rejected the creeds as forms of coercion, they did not have the typical constraints upon their interpretations and doctrinal development. However, to say that there are no constraining factors is not accurate either.³⁹⁹ While the Brethren do indeed reject the creeds, their interpretation of scripture is constrained by both their approach as well as their community. Thus we now turn to the present hermeneutical approach of the CoB.

Modern Brethren Hermeneutical Approach

As has already been argued and as will continue to be developed, the Brethren accept creeds as a means to confine neither their belief nor their interpretations. If this is so, then what are the restraining factors for interpretation? How do Brethren read and interpret scripture? The first key issue for Brethren scriptural interpretation is that methodology is not authoritative. This means that it is not the method that is significant but the reading of scripture is. The 1979 annual conference paper regarding biblical authority asserted this idea when it recommended to the conference that "Bible study events be designed and carried out which allow for in-depth

³⁹⁷Brown, "Theology," The Brethren Encyclopedia. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983), vol. 2, 1260.

³⁹⁸Ibid.

³⁹⁹The concern for interpretative constraints rests in the acknowledgment of Stanley Fish's statement, "Interpretation is not the act of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them." Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 327. The idea behind this statement is that any given community will establish an understanding of any text according to the presuppositions held by the community. In other words, Fish argues that a text can mean different things to different communities. This leads to a total relativity of meaning for the text; thus giving rise to concern for constraining biblical interpretations.

sharing of *diverse approaches* to biblical texts . . .⁴⁰⁰ This demonstrates the openness for an eclectic use of methods for biblical interpretation. While the *Gemeinde* could not agree upon a concrete statement regarding biblical authority and inspiration, they did agree upon the *Gemeinde's* "need for a continuing dialogue with and about scripture" with the hope that it would experience "biblical renewal."⁴⁰¹ Therefore, methodology was not an issue. The emphasis was placed upon the continued study of scripture using diversity as a means of initiating dialogue.

Secondly, the CoB, much like other Anabaptist communities, interprets scripture "in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ."⁴⁰² They interpret the Old Testament through the New Testament and the New Testament through the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. Traditionally, Brethren have affirmed that supreme authority lies not in the scriptures but in the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ.⁴⁰³ However, the scripture has always been of vital significance for the fellowship. This approach does not allow equal readings of all scriptures but requires a presupposed perspective through which one reads them, namely the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰⁴

Additional interpretative restraints lie within the *Gemeinde* as a hermeneutical

⁴⁰⁰193rd Church of the Brethren Annual Conference; Seattle, Washington, 565. Emphasis given is mine.

⁴⁰¹Ibid., 564.

⁴⁰²Ibid., 562.

⁴⁰³Both Martin Schrag, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," BLT, 9:Fall:1964, and Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Brethren and the Authority of Scriptures," BLT, 13:1968, discuss the Brethren and scriptural authority. Schrag argues that the Early Brethren held Jesus Christ as the authority for the church (117). Durnbaugh, on the other hand, describes the Brethren approach to scripture to be Christ-centred and that authority, as pertaining to the Manual of Brotherhood Organization and Polity (1965), is in the New Testament being the ultimate rule of faith and practice. As already discussed there is no present consensus in the *Gemeinde* as to a stance on authority because of problematic definitions with terminology (such as *infallible*, *inerrancy*, *inspiration*, etc). In a more recent article, Richard B. Gardner, "Brethren and the Bible," BLT, XXVIII: Winter: 1983, offers some help to the difference found between Durnbaugh and Schrag. He says first that Brethren believe that authority ultimately rests in God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. However, he also adds that Brethren have "resisted attempts to separate God's authority and scriptural authority" (8). Therefore, it can be said that Brethren affirm the authority of scripture in as much as it is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

⁴⁰⁴Durnbaugh illustrates their belief that all scripture is not of the same value in his article, "Brethren and the Authority of Scriptures" (178) citing an excerpt from a 1964 CoB membership manual. The excerpt reads that accepting all scripture as having the same value "would be like taking Psalm 137: 9, 'Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks!' and saying that it is on the same level as Christ's prayer for his enemies, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34) . . ."

community. The hermeneutical community is made up of core convictions which continually are shaped by biblical interpretation and continually shape biblical interpretation as an ongoing dialogue takes place between the individuals in community and scripture. These convictions, which have been formerly discussed, direct and shape the interpretation as the reader engages the scripture. However, one aspect must not be overlooked, the Holy Spirit plays a presupposed role with interpretation by "creating faith and understanding of the message of Scripture."⁴⁰⁵ Each individual in the community, being Spirit filled, engages in a relational dialogue with scripture and the Holy Spirit. The dialogue existing between the hermeneutical community and scripture is not exclusive, but is always predisposed to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In fact the Brethren believe that the Spirit continues revealing and instructing in new ways as God writes his word on the hearts of the faithful.⁴⁰⁶ Great diversity exists in the present CoB both with interpretative approaches and with biblical understandings.⁴⁰⁷ However, for the most part Brethren affirm their shared convictions and their desire to read and interpret scripture.

Some Observations

Finally, in a brief comparison between the Early Brethren hermeneutical approach and the Modern Brethren hermeneutical approach one finds few differences. Even as the Early Brethren, the modern *Gemeinde* still embraces Christ-centred biblical interpretation; they still place greater value upon the writings of the New Testament over the Old Testament; they continue to read the scripture in a straightforward, commonsense manner, while believing that the Holy Spirit (the inner Word) convicts them to respond pragmatically. Their interpretation of the scripture is still controlled by the convictions of the community, which originally arose from prayer and study. Herein lies the difference; while the convictions which have affected and continue to affect biblical interpretation remain the same, the interpreted understanding of these convictions has changed (and continue to change). For example, as has already been shown the Brethren doctrine of "no force in religion" originally communicated the conviction that government had no authority in matters of faith. This doctrine was later reinterpreted to mean

⁴⁰⁵Gardner, "Brethren and the Bible," 7.

⁴⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰⁷The methods applied vary from straightforward literalistic readings to the application of modern methodologies.

that the church should not discipline its members through means of coercion and disownings. Therefore, not only has CoB biblical interpretation been affected by modern methodological approaches, but their interpretation is now shaped differently by their reinterpretations of these core convictions. The question now arises as to what may be in store for the CoB regarding biblical interpretation. How will they interpret scripture according to these changes and still be a distinct witness to the world in the 21st century?

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish what it means for the CoB to be a hermeneutical community and the significance of it; to determine the narrative identity of the CoB; and finally to describe the Modern Brethren hermeneutical approach to biblical interpretation. What has emerged from my argument is that while all communities are to some extent "hermeneutical communities," the significance of the CoB as being such is their particular hermeneutical approach and the convictions that shape their interpretations. Being a hermeneutical community is understood by the narrative nature of the community. The narrative nature is predominantly the narrative tradition that forms the community. This tradition consists of the shared memories which shape the perception of those within the community. In this sense all communities are hermeneutical. For the CoB, this becomes particularly significant because it lacks the *normative* controlling factors for interpretation and belief. Thus the hermeneutical community sharing a narrative tradition shapes the interpretation and convictions of the individuals. However, the convictions themselves allow for freedom to interpret and believe according to the Spirit's conviction upon the individual.

Having established the CoB as being a hermeneutical community, it became necessary to determine the narrative tradition of the CoB. The narrative tradition of the CoB is based upon a series of complex convictions and the events that led to their eventual reinterpretations. These reinterpretations were the result of the changed focus of the CoB to an outward perspective. This was based upon the Brethren's desire to minister to the world rather than remaining inwardly focused. Therefore, while the narrative tradition of the CoB remained the same, the *Gemeinde's* understanding of it changed with the reinterpretations of the core convictions. This, however, has raised some additional observations and challenges for the CoB. Here, I argued that the effects of conflict and schism within the *Gemeinde* played a greater initiating role for the reinterpretation of the convictions than has been previously

acknowledged. I also observed that while the fellowship became more tolerant, diversity emerged among them. With this new diversity came an increased individualism and consequently a new struggle for the Brethren identity as it faces a new century.

I argued that noncredalism in its modern interpretation, stands as the most significant factor in biblical interpretation for the CoB. While the basic idea of this is that the individual should be able to interpret scripture and form beliefs without coercion from any institution, I also criticized it since it contradicts the idea of a hermeneutical community. This reinterpreted conviction disallows the conversation and authoritative outcome of the hermeneutical community. Therefore, if we understand the church as the community, then consequently this reinterpretation moves closer to the Radical Pietism (and individualism) that the Early Brethren left. Finally, while there is great diversity in the CoB, they generally share a strong desire to study and interpret scripture. In addition I showed that the primary difference in biblical interpretation, between the Early Brethren and the Modern Brethren, lies in the interpretation of their core convictions. This leaves the obvious question as to how the CoB will interpret scripture according to the changes and still be a distinct witness to the world in the 21st century?

CONCLUSION

From the beginning, this thesis has set out to present the CoB as a hermeneutical community who need to develop a hermeneutical strategy for the twenty-first century. In the process of doing this it was necessary to critically examine the Brethren identity both past and present. To accomplish this, I briefly outlined their historical identity; I defined their hermeneutical perspective both past and present with a comparison of the two; likewise I presented a description of both the Early Brethren reading method and the current trends of biblical interpretation within the fellowship.

It was necessary to identify the Church of the Brethren as a community that developed out of the Radical Reformation. Specifically, they left the established church thus joining the Radical Pietists. Following much scriptural study and prayer they left Radical Pietism and adopted an Anabaptist ecclesiology. This convergence of Radical Pietism and Anabaptism stands at the heart of the Early Brethren identity. Following their formation, the fellowship experienced rapid growth and persecution in Germany. Eventually, they emigrated to Pennsylvania and again they experienced growth. However this growth was accompanied by division and controversy. Even as these divisions and controversies were devastating to the community, they were overshadowed by the development of world missions and higher education both of which contributed to changing the focus of the Brethren community. Instead of being inwardly focused and resistant to outward influences and outreaching actions, the Brethren community began focusing their attention on the world around them. Moreover, with the heightened interest in higher education the Brethren became increasingly influenced by modernity. Although ultimately neither extreme of Fundamentalism nor Liberalism would be found in the CoB, the effects of modernity were significant. This chapter concluded that the combination of modernity's influence and the effects of the divisions caused changes to occur in the fellowship. This chapter also raised questions as to the specifics of the Brethren identity, their hermeneutical perspective, and their approach to biblical interpretation.

Having identified the CoB, chapter two set out to define the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren as being a complex interrelationship of their unique narratives and convictions both of which find their roots in Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. In addition, chapter two described the Early Brethren Bible reading method as being a straightforward-

commonsense approach. In the process of these descriptions, I demonstrated that there is no simplistic definition for the CoB identity, specifically as being either Anabaptist or Radical Pietist. Moreover, I demonstrated that Vernard Eller's argument, regarding the Brethren identity as a dialectic tension between Pietism and Anabaptism, is also an inadequate description. Finally, I showed that the Early Brethren read scripture in a "straightforward manner" applying common sense and seeking practical application. I also showed that they possessed a unique understanding of scriptural authority, which placed supreme authority in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This chapter also showed that they held an openness to new truths as they were revealed by the Inner Word through scripture. Finally, I showed that their approach to scripture is best described as a "threefold" interrelationship between the written word, the Holy Spirit, and the community. This relationship takes place as the community negotiates an interpretation of the text with guidance of Holy Spirit. While the conclusion of this chapter is that the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective is primarily made up of a complex interrelationship between the distinctive narratives and convictions of the *Gemeinde*, four additional questions became evident. What does it mean to be a hermeneutical community? What is the difference between the narrative convictions of the Early Brethren and the present CoB? How have they changed, if at all? And how has this affected their approach to scripture and their interpretation of it?

Chapter three fulfilled the thesis in the process of answering these four questions. By answering the first question, I expanded upon John Howard Yoder's idea of what it means to be a hermeneutical community and the significance of it. In the process I also presented the narrative identity of the CoB by a close examination of the core convictions as they were reinterpreted. Lastly, I described the current Brethren approach to biblical interpretation and compared it with the Early Brethren. What emerged from my argument was that while all communities may claim to be "hermeneutical communities" to some extent, the distinction of the Brethren as a hermeneutical community exists in their particular hermeneutical perspective and how it shapes their biblical interpretation. Having established the CoB as being a hermeneutical community, I then presented their narrative tradition by outlining the development of their core convictions through the years. Their narrative tradition is based upon a series of complex convictions and the events that led to their reinterpretations. I determined that these reinterpretations were the result of the changed focus of the CoB to an outward perspective. The basis of this conclusion is the Brethren's desire to minister to the world rather than remaining inwardly focused and separated from it. Thus I demonstrated also that while their

narrative tradition remained the same, their understanding of it changed with the reinterpretations of the convictions. Consequently this raised particular questions and challenges. In answering these questions, I suggested that the effects of conflict and schism within the *Gemeinde* served to motivate the reinterpretations of the convictions to a greater extent than has been previously acknowledged. I also argued that as a result of the increasing tolerance in the fellowship, diversity has also emerged. With this new diversity came an increased individualism and consequently a new struggle for the Brethren identity as it faces a new century.

This chapter concluded that noncredalism, in its modern interpretation, is a central factor in biblical interpretation for the Brethren. While recognizing its role, I also criticized it saying that it contradicts the idea of being a "hermeneutical community." I showed that the contradiction becomes apparent in the way that this modern conviction undermines community by being extremely individualistic. This conviction disallows the conversation and authoritative outcome of the hermeneutical community. Therefore, instead of embracing a fuller Anabaptist ecclesiology, this reinterpretation moves the fellowship closer to the Radical Pietists (and individualism) which the Early Brethren initially left. While there is great diversity in the CoB, they generally share a strong desire to study and interpret scripture and that the primary difference in biblical interpretation, between then and now, lies in the interpretation of their core convictions.

Finally I demonstrated that due to the CoB origins being rooted in the Radical Reformation, a voice of criticism within their hermeneutic, sufficient to challenge and reform the fellowship according to scripture, is necessary. The underlying conclusion was the fellowship's need to return to scripture. However the question arose as to what symbol could serve this hermeneutical cause challenging and reforming the current trends in the church. Therefore I presented the Brethren love feast as an appropriate symbol for the twenty-first century. Even as it was shown that while the Early Brethren held baptism as a central symbol that demonstrated their participation in the rejection of societal and religious norms and identifying themselves with a counter-culture community, so also will the love feast stand as a criticism of western culture. However, in order for this to occur a conversation must begin regarding this hermeneutical strategy. A discussion regarding how Brethren can read scripture in ways that continually challenge the fellowship to be counter-cultural, to resist the individualism of western culture, and to remain a relevant witness to society must occur. New questions must be asked

such as, "what would this new hermeneutical approach look like?" How will it be applied? In addition questions regarding the issue of a symbol must also be asked. In what ways will the Brethren love feast serve this cause? If the CoB is to continue engaging their struggles, they must begin a conversation that reverts to scripture as the basis of their identity.

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