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THE EMERGENCE OF THE UNITED MENNONITES IN ONTARIO

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For Christians living in Ontario, the nineteenth century provided many occasions to consider, or perhaps reconsider, one's religious identity and what constituted proper relations with members of other churches.[1] How should American immigrants who were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church relate to Wesleyan Methodists from England? Would old European conflicts reignite in interactions between German Lutherans from Pennsylvania and French Roman Catholics descended from settlers of New France? In 1867 and afterward, in a land where the desire to build a great, unified nation of British North American lands had overcome, and was continuing to overcome, some significant barriers to unity, should theological differences continue to preclude institutional unity between Protestant denominations?[2] Evangelicalism, with its tendency to cross denominational boundaries, was surely an important factor in the formation and the answering of these questions.[3] If many Protestants could agree on core doctrines and practices, such as conversion and the holding of revival meetings, perhaps denominational lines could be transcended in outward, visible ways, much as how, in the newly formed Dominion of Canada, provincial lines were

1. In this essay, terms such as "Ontario" and "Canada" will in some cases be used anachronistically.

2. See Airhart, "Ordering a New Nation," 98–101.

3. For information on how the Second Great Awakening broke down associations between ethnicity and denomination, see González, *The Reformation*, 328. For information on interdenominational participation in early revival camp meetings in the United States, see Wolffe, *Expansion of Evangelicalism*, 60. For information on diversity and unity in the emerging evangelicalism of the first half of the nineteenth century, see pp. 228–47.

respected and yet transcended by the Dominion and its governmental structures.

These questions could be exciting, but they could also be quite worrying. The reconsideration of a person or group's religious identity could bring with it the modification, dilution, or even abandonment of important beliefs, practices, traditions, and feelings of connectivity. Among the many religious groups who were influenced and, in the minds of some, threatened by the religious and cultural climate of nineteenth-century Ontario were the Mennonites, whose countercultural traditions and way of life had become, for many, an integral part of their identity in their peaceful new homeland. In this essay, I will explore one cluster of events that took place as part of the Mennonites' struggle with their identity within this societal and religious context. In particular, I will focus on the emergence of the Ontario wing of the United Mennonites of Canada, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio, a short-lived and little-acknowledged organization of dissenting Mennonites that soon went on to merge into other church organizations. In the first two sections of the essay, I will provide contextual information, focusing on Mennonite identity and the religious milieu of nineteenth-century Ontario. In the third section, I will describe the major events in the emergence of the United Mennonites in Ontario, relating them to the Mennonites' struggles over their identity. In the fourth section, I will delineate some core aspects of the Ontario United Mennonites' reimagined identity, focusing on the issues of non-traditional religious meetings, conversion experiences, open communion, and a sense of calling to ministry. Through all of this, I will seek to show that the United Mennonites of Ontario developed an innovative religious identity that, while still affirming the essentials of the Mennonite tradition, incorporated new aspects that were more in line with evangelicalism and revivalism.[4]

4. Through a series of mergers, the United Mennonites contributed to what are now the Evangelical Missionary Church in Canada and the (American) Missionary Church (which in the rest of this footnote are collectively called the Missionary Churches, even in reference to their precursors). There is little secondary literature on the early history of the Missionary Churches; the main resources are histories of the Mennonites and the Missionary Churches

The Mennonite Identity in Europe and North America

Mennonite thinking was forged in a context of war, controversy, and fear. It emerged as part of Anabaptism, a Christian movement originating in the sixteenth century that attempted to complete the work of the Protestant Reformation by eliminating what was viewed as unbiblical tradition and attempting to live in rigid accordance the with ideas and practices found in the Bible, especially the New Testament. Although there was a significant amount of diversity within this movement, its adherents were unified by their insistence on baptizing only those who had made a mature, reasoned decision to follow Christ, a practice that precluded infant baptism. This belief implied religious and political rebellion, as the state churches, which were linked with the governmental systems of the day, practiced infant baptism. Consequently, members of this movement were often persecuted by both Protestant and Catholic authorities and quickly spread their teachings across Europe as they fled for safety.[5]

One of the most famous Anabaptist leaders was Melchior Hoffman, a travelling teacher who did much to spread Anabaptist doctrines throughout the continent. Although his career as a religious teacher was cut short by imprisonment, his followers in the Low Countries continued in two groups. The first was a revolutionary group that established a disastrous and short-lived

and a number of carefully researched articles, mainly biographical, in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. There are two notable exceptions. The first is Eaton and Boehner, "Practicing Peace," 217–21, which makes an interesting note about how the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBiC), a descendant of the United Mennonites and precursor of the contemporary Missionary Churches (for more information, see Eaton and Boehner, "Practicing Peace," 219; Brenneman, "Daniel Brenneman," 29), departed from the Mennonite way of life (Eaton and Boehner, "Practicing Peace," 221). The other is Gerber, "Founding Issues," 9–15 which offers a short overview of some key issues involved in the formation of the MBiC. Of course, there are also other, more general historical sources that briefly mention the Missionary Churches (e.g., Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 212). This essay synthesizes the contributions of the major secondary sources and refines the history of the United Mennonites through the use of some important primary sources.

5. For some information on early Anabaptist history, see Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Thought*, 97–142.

theocracy in Münster, Germany, and the second was a peaceful group that faced severe persecution.[6] One leader of the peaceful group was Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest who served as an Anabaptist pastor across the Netherlands, northwestern Germany, and Holstein, Denmark, and established a group of believers that came to be known as the Mennonites.[7] In 1632, Mennonites drafted the Dordrecht Confession of Faith, an enduring statement of Mennonite theology and practice that included, among other things, pacifism, believer's baptism, and the belief that the true church included only those who repented and were truly baptized.[8] Finding the same fate as many other Anabaptists, these believers faced severe persecution that forced them to seek refuge in other lands such as Poland and Russia.[9]

From their early years under the leadership of Menno Simons, the Mennonites maintained an identity that was distinct from those of other Christian groups. Their Anabaptist convictions, such as their commitment to believer's baptism, clearly distinguished them from the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches and forced them to live on the fringes of society.[10] Furthermore, their historical connection with Melchiorite Anabaptism would have made life especially hard, as the unsavory memories of the revolutionary group's theocracy must have persisted for some time. Simons' desire to separate his followers from this group, known as the Münsterites, is apparent in his *Reply to Gellius Faber*, in which he describes their mistakes as "errors of which we are clear and always have been."[11] Though it is unclear exactly how much the Münsterite legacy tarnished the Mennonites' reputation, it certainly would not have inspired feelings of tolerance or acceptance from the existing civil and

6. Wenger, "Melchiorites," 756.

7. Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe*, 185–209; Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Thought*, 224–25; Wenger, "Melchiorites," 756. For further reading, see Friesen, "Present at the Inception," 351–88.

8. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 40; "Dordrecht Confession of Faith."

9. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 24–25; Dyck, *Introduction to Mennonite History*, 175.

10. Miller, "Marking Mennonite Identity," 258.

11. Simons, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 774.

religious authorities, which already had a tendency to act in violence against bold dissenters like the Mennonites. It is no wonder that early Mennonite history has many stories of persecution and hardship.

Starting in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, many Mennonites immigrated to the North American colony of Pennsylvania, which provided a long-awaited haven from persecution.[12] Although this freedom was certainly positive in many respects, it forced upon them an identity crisis. Now that they lived in a society that welcomed them instead of persecuting them, separation as it had been practiced on the other side of the Atlantic was impossible.[13] Consequently, Mennonites began to redefine the concept of separation, focusing mostly on cultural patterns that distinguished them from their non-Mennonite neighbors.[14] Because of the Mennonites' pious tendencies, theological issues undoubtedly played a part in their new identity, but it no longer had unavoidable political and economic consequences as it had in Europe. The preservation of the Mennonite identity now relied on the continued efforts of the community.

Maintaining this distinct religious and cultural identity in the United States was not always an easy task. One threat was the presence of religious revivals, which often transcended denominational boundaries. In one instance, a group of Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, participated in a revival that included Lutherans and Baptists. Some of the participants in this revival, many of them Mennonites, began to meet separately and were known as the River Brethren.[15] Though this group

12. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 42–43. Note that some Mennonites lived in other parts of what is now the United States. There was, e.g., a community in Delaware that "claimed Mennonite associations" (Sawatsky, *History and Ideology*, 9).

13. Miller, "Marking Mennonite Identity," 259.

14. Sawatsky, *History and Ideology*, 27–28; Miller, "Marking Mennonite Identity," 259–60. The entirety of *History and Ideology* concerns the subject of Mennonite identity in the United States.

15. Dyck, *Introduction to Mennonite History*, 313–14.

continued in the "plain" style of the Mennonites, it was never formally reconciled with the Mennonite community.[16]

Another concern was the desire of some Mennonites to modernize. Many clergymen, most notably John H. Oberholtzer of Pennsylvania, began to feel frustrated with the Mennonites' resistance to change, which included, but was not limited to, a rejection of English preaching, Sunday schools, and community involvement.[17] Eventually, Oberholtzer and all his ordained supporters were excommunicated and formed the East Pennsylvania District of Mennonites, which included one-third of the Mennonites' Franconia Conference.[18] Oberholtzer's movement, of course, posed a severe threat to those who wished to preserve the established Mennonite identity in America. If outside cultural forms were brought into Mennonite congregations, a weakening of the established identity would almost certainly come as a result.

In the late eighteenth century, another wave of Mennonite migration began. After the American Revolution, some Mennonites living in the newly established United States headed north, as did many other Americans, to British lands that were in 1791 constituted as Upper Canada. Here there was an abundance of land and opportunity for the Mennonites, many of whom were none too impressed with the Revolution. Most of these first Mennonite settlers, counted among the poorly named Late Loyalists, made their homes in the Niagara area, but before long they settled in other areas such as Waterloo and Markham.[19] Here, as in their previous homes in the New World, they were welcomed rather than persecuted. In fact, the lieutenant governor of Upper Canada himself invited Mennonites and a few other kinds of pacifistic

16. Dyck, *Introduction to Mennonite History*, 314; Sider, *The Brethren in Christ*, 1–5. The Be in Christ Church, formerly called Brethren in Christ Canada, is one contemporary descendant of the River Brethren. For their history up to the 1980s, see Sider, *The Brethren in Christ*.

17. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 137.

18. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 139–40.

19. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 50–63; Christie, "In These Times," 20; Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 23–24. For information on the formation of Upper Canada, see Baskerville, *Sites of Power*, 49–52.

Christians to come make their home there.[20] Naturally, then, issues surrounding identity followed the Mennonites on their long and treacherous journey north.[21] Again, the preservation of their distinct identity required the vigilance of the members of the communities.

Religion and Evangelicalism in Ontario

From the time of the major Mennonite migration to Upper Canada through to the end of the nineteenth century, the religious landscape of Ontario was not drastically different from that of America. There was a fairly strong Roman Catholic presence, comprising about 13.4 percent of the population in 1842, but Protestantism was clearly dominant. The three main branches were Anglicanism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism, and there were also some Lutherans, Baptists, and members of a few other groups.[22] Statistics from 1842, 1848, and 1851 show that Anglicanism had the highest number of affiliates, hovering a little over 20 percent of the total population, with the Methodists about 1 percent behind in 1851, but John Webster Grant asserts that there were probably more active Methodists than Anglicans as early as 1812.[23] In any case, by 1861 the Methodists had the highest numbers, 25.1 percent, with the Anglicans trailing behind in second and the Presbyterians in a close third. By 1891 the Methodists had taken a strong lead, with 30.9 percent of the overall population. Anglican numbers dropped to 18.3 percent, and the Presbyterians, with 21.4 percent, a slight decrease from 1881 and again from 1871, held second place overall. Between 1842 and 1891, Roman Catholics and Baptists saw some growth, and "others" and those with "no preference or no creed" saw decline, the latter group plummeting from 16.7 to 1.1.[24] Though these

20. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 67.

21. For information on the Mennonites' journeys, see Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 67–69.

22. Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 79–80, 224; Christie, "In These Times," 10–11, 20–21.

23. Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 58, 224.

24. Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 224.

numbers reflect a host of events and shifting realities in Ontario during this time, among the major stories told here are the rapid rise of Methodism and the decline of Anglicanism.[25] This huge change was accompanied by related developments such as the retraction of the Anglicans' exclusive claim on the clergy reserves (one-seventh of the land set aside for Protestant clergy), a claim that had always been somewhat questionable, and the bestowal of the right to officiate weddings upon Methodist ministers.[26]

In the early years of the nineteenth century, the Methodists were the main representatives of evangelical Christianity, its revival-oriented approach to religion, and the closely related Second Great Awakening.[27] While their concern for holy living and Christian perfection may sometimes have overshadowed the evangelical emphasis on conversion experiences,[28] this core aspect of the evangelical identity was certainly still a part of Methodism. Notable was the Methodists' use of non-traditional religious meetings, particularly camp meetings. Such gatherings were held by other evangelicals in their revival efforts, but the Methodists employed them thoughtfully and, as Grant says,

25. William Westfall writes that "to a large extent the history of the [Upper Canadian] culture as a whole was the history of Upper Canadian Methodism" (*Two Worlds*, 51). Of course, due to continued immigration, a decline in percentage of the total population does not necessarily indicate defections or failures in passing on denominational affiliation to progeny, though both were surely present to some degree.

26. Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 85–93; Carrington, *Anglican Church*, 52–53, 76–77, 93, 117; Baskerville, *Sites of Power*, 50.

27. Rawlyk, *Canada Fire*, 102; Christie, "In These Times," 11; Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 58. There is a danger of exaggerating the prominence of revivalism in Methodism. Christie and Gauvreau claim that "revivals did not comprise the main current within Methodism . . . in any specific period" (*Christian Churches*, 39). It is also worth noting that, according to Christie and Gauvreau, revivals may have been popular mainly among American immigrants (*Christian Churches*, 39).

28. See Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 59. For an interesting discussion of how the Methodists' understanding of conversion and holiness differed from that of the Plymouth Brethren, see Airhart, "What Must I Do," 372–81.

"made [them] peculiarly their own."[29] Another important characteristic of Methodist ministry on both sides of the border was its willingness to open positions of spiritual leadership to those who felt a calling from God, even if they had not been trained according to traditional methods and standards. In 1825 the Anglican archdeacon John Strachan, a significant figure in Ontario history, harshly criticized the Methodist ministers in Upper Canada, describing them as ignorant and unwilling to learn.[30]

Evangelicalism and revivalism were present in other traditions as well. The other two major kinds of Protestantism, Anglicanism and Presbyterianism, both had a notable evangelical presence, and by 1840 evangelicalism was dominant in the Presbyterian churches in Canada.[31] Certain smaller groups, such as the Baptists and the River Brethren, who in Canada were called the Tunkers, gave further representation and expression to evangelical ideas.[32] Together, the evangelicals from various denominations formed a huge portion of the population. Historian G. A. Rawlyk estimates—though being careful to note that his estimates are very rough—that as early as 1808 somewhere around 40 percent of Upper Canadians were likely evangelicals or at least belonged to evangelical churches or communities.[33]

As the century went on, evangelicalism and revivalism in Ontario were complicated by complex and varied forces. Intellectually, there were Darwinism and biblical higher criticism, which challenged some established beliefs and approaches to reading Scripture.[34] At the societal level there were tremendous changes,

29. Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 58–59, quotation from 59. See also Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 55–66.

30. González, *The Reformation*, 328; Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed," 60.

31. Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed," 56. For more information on evangelicalism and Presbyterianism up to 1875, see Crerar, "Crackling Sounds," 123–36.

32. Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed," 56; Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 24; Sider, *The Brethren in Christ*, 5–15, esp. 9.

33. Rawlyk, *Canada Fire*, 121–23.

34. Airhart, "Ordering a New Nation," 108, 111–12; Gauvreau, *Evangelical Century*, 79–90, 125–80. Note that both sources focus on Canada as a whole and not just Ontario.

not least of which was the Anglicans' decline in power and the Methodists' increase.[35] Relatedly, as time went on, Methodism became increasingly established and formal, and while there was strong resistance in some circles, the dominant streams of Methodism flowed away from the organic and unrestrained revival meetings of the nineteenth century's early years.[36] But even amidst these changes, evangelicalism and revivalism persisted, their shapes ever changing with the times.[37]

Thus, the Mennonites who settled in Ontario entered a land that quickly became soaked in the spirit of evangelical revival. Coming into contact with evangelicals and their zeal was almost unavoidable. Even resistance to the English language would not prevent such interaction, as the Evangelical Association, a German-speaking Methodist group, ministered in the area and propagated an evangelical message.[38] An important question, then, for Mennonites clearing and tilling land in nineteenth-century Ontario was how they would react to the society in which they lived and the evangelicalism and revivalism that permeated it. Would they put up barriers and strive to keep their established Mennonite identity intact, or would they allow the flood of evangelical piety to rush into their communities and potentially alter their religion and their self-understanding?

Identity Struggles and the Formation of the United Mennonites

The first of the controversies leading up to the formation of the United Mennonites began in the 1840s in Lincoln County, a fertile stretch of land in the Niagara Peninsula. The Evangelical Association began conducting outreach in this area and found a

35. Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 67.

36. Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 53, 66–81.

37. For an interesting overview of Canadian Protestantism from 1867 to 1914, see Airhart, "Ordering a New Nation," 98–138. G. A. Rawlyk speaks of the tendency of evangelicalism to change "its shape and its colours, but never its core essence" (Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, xiv).

38. See Bender and Thiessen, "Evangelical Association"; Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 161.

receptive audience among some Mennonites, including Bishop Jacob Gross and the itinerant minister Daniel Hoch.[39] Both men began to encourage non-traditional religious meetings such as Sunday schools and prayer meetings among their own, and apparently they saw some success, as in 1847 prayer meetings were officially approved and around this time a number of Mennonites organized a Sunday school.[40] The motivations behind these changes are not entirely clear, but certainly religious concerns were present. The revival-oriented Methodist style offered religious excitement and encouraged discipleship, which must have been attractive to the discipleship-focused Mennonites. Strengthened relations with non-Mennonites, especially German-speakers, may also have been welcome to some members of the community, as they would have provided opportunities for further social interaction and the pursuit of new business relationships.

Whatever the motivations, they were not shared by all the Mennonites in Lincoln County. A group of conservatives, led by minister Dilman Moyer, opposed the bishop and the newly introduced practices.[41] Their precise concerns are not entirely clear either, but they almost certainly flowed, even if only partially, from a concern to preserve the established Mennonite ways. Interestingly, the bishop did not silence Moyer, possibly because Moyer's father was the first Mennonite bishop in Canada.[42] Instead, Gross allowed the continued existence of two factions within the Lincoln Mennonite community: what Gross' ally Daniel Hoch called "the prayer-minded group" (probably

39. Steiner, "Gross, Jacob"; Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 37–38.

40. Fuller, "Gross, Jacob"; Burkholder, *A Brief History*, 46; Hoch, *Disclosure of the Persecutions*, 3.

41. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 145. In this essay, the terms "conservative" and "progressive" are not used according to their usage in most discussions about Protestantism; rather, they relate to the established religious norms in the Mennonite community of that time. Conservatism involves the preservation of norms, and progressivism involves the challenging and changing of certain norms. For the most part, the use of the terms in this essay relates to the norms challenged by non-traditional religious meetings, conversion experiences, open communion, and a sense of calling to ministry.

42. Steiner, "Moyer, Jacob."

meaning the prayer-meeting group), and "the non-praying group."[43] The grievances between these groups were so great that at the advice of Bishop Benjamin Eby of Waterloo County, these two groups held communion separately in the fall of 1848.[44]

If the conservatives were concerned about assimilation and a loss of a distinctive Mennonite identity, as they likely were, they had reason for their concern. Although Hoch showed resistance to co-operation with other religious groups, Bishop Gross took a much more inclusive approach, and some Mennonites even hosted Evangelical Association–led meetings in their homes, meetings that the bishop attended. In what must have confirmed some of the more extreme conservative worries, a number of people, including a daughter of the bishop, had a conversion experience and joined the Evangelical Association.[45] In May 1849 Bishop Eby intervened and silenced Gross—a bishop decisively exercising authority over another bishop—as well as Hoch and a deacon. Gross and his family joined the Evangelical Association and never returned to the Mennonite Church.[46]

Absorption into the Evangelical Association was simply not an option for Hoch. He was, and would always be, a Mennonite, even if his approach to ministry and devotion were somewhat different from the established norms. Later in 1849 he achieved reconciliation with the Mennonite Church but found himself

43. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 145.

44. Steiner, "Gross, Jacob." Steiner points out that the existence of three meeting houses in the area made it possible for each group to worship separately. He does not say, however, whether or not this was a regular practice.

45. Fuller, "Gross, Jacob."

46. Fuller, "Gross, Jacob." Hoch, *Disclosure of the Persecutions*, 5. A somewhat informal publication, this source does not officially name Daniel Hoch as the author of the work. It is, however, apparent from the content of the book that Hoch is the author. In confirmation of this, an advertisement for the book in an edition of the *Mennonite Historian* lists him as the author (see "For Sale," 5). The online catalogue of the Milton Good Library of Conrad Grebel University College lists Isaac R. Horst and J. H. Oberholtzer as the authors of the work. The same page, however, notes that these people translated the book at separate times, showing that they were not the authors (the catalogue is available at http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca).

unable to continue his ministry within the church, because he was decisively rejected by his conservative opponents.[47] Undeterred from his religious-renewal efforts, he aligned himself with John H. Oberholtzer, the above-mentioned leading innovator among American Mennonites, who ordained him as the bishop of his Mennonite followers, most of them probably having comprised the "prayer-minded group" in the days of Bishop Gross. Hoch also pastored a congregation in Jordan, Ontario.[48]

A bold and zealous propagator of his views, Hoch soon found followers in Waterloo County, and he ordained two ministers and one deacon from the area on 13 July 1852.[49] A very supportive letter to Hoch from Samuel Bauman, published in 1853, shows a great eagerness of Waterloo Mennonites to help Hoch in his ministry.[50] In May 1854 he came to Waterloo when Oberholtzer and William Gehman, another progressive Mennonite leader from the United States, were in the area.[51] Evidently, innovative and modernizing approaches to Mennonite faith were becoming popular in this area, and the ambitious Hoch placed himself close to the center of the action.

One of the most significant supporters of Hoch in Waterloo County was Samuel Schlichter, a Mennonite minister at the Blenheim Meeting House who emphasized personal forgiveness and the active presence of the Holy Spirit. By 1853 he had clearly identified himself as a progressive leader, as he preached at the Blenheim Union Meeting House, which was shared by other Christian groups known for their revivalism.[52] In either 1854 or

47. Hoch, *Disclosure of the Persecutions*, 6, 9.

48. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 146; Steiner, "Hoch, Daniel."

49. Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands*, 113.

50. Samuel B. Bauman to Daniel Hoch, published in *Religioser Botschafter*, 19 September 1853, 15.

51. Samuel B. Bauman and Elizabeth Bauman to Christian Bauman and wife, Isaac Bauman and wife, John B. Guth and wife, and "all friends and acquaintances around you," 8 September 1854, Samuel B. Bauman fonds, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo. For an overview of the life and ministry of William Gehman, see Storms, "Gehman, William."

52. Fuller, "Schlichter, Samuel."

1855, Schlichter left the Mennonite Church and allied himself with Hoch and his followers, who had become known as the New Mennonites.[53] Other notable figures among the New Mennonites of Waterloo County included John McNally of Blair (now part of Cambridge)[54] and Ulrich Geiger, who was ordained in the Mennonite Church in 1838 and was later a preacher for Hoch's group.[55]

By the early 1860s, the New Mennonite movement had spread into Huron County. Peter Geiger, the son of Ulrich Geiger, moved there from Waterloo County and worked as a farmer. He had a conversion experience around 1859 and was ordained with the New Mennonites in 1863, thereafter serving as a preacher in the county's Hay Township. During the same decade, Hoch and Schlichter made several pastoral visits to the county. Following the death of his wife in 1873, Peter Geiger moved back to Waterloo County, where he continued to be involved with the ministry of the New Mennonites.[56]

As the New Mennonites were establishing themselves in Lincoln, Waterloo, and Huron Counties, another Mennonite revival movement was starting in York County, a division of land to the northeast that included what is now Toronto. The movement began when Abraham Raymer, an ordained Mennonite minister, adopted a more evangelistic style to his preaching.[57] He had previously struggled with assurance of salvation and believed himself to be unsaved until he had a conversion experience at age

53. Fuller, "Schlichter, Samuel."

54. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 33.

55. Burkholder, *A Brief History*, 180; Benjamin Eby to Jacob Groff and Daniel Hewber, 8 July 1851, Mennonite Brethren in Christ fonds, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo. It is noteworthy that, according to this letter, Ulrich Geiger renounced the New Mennonites after preaching for them. According to Samuel Steiner, he eventually allied himself with Hoch once again (Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands*, 112–13).

56. Fuller, "Geiger, Peter."

57. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 40. Abraham's name is misspelled as "Abram" in Huffman's account, though it is spelled correctly in a quotation from Levi Raymer.

31.[58] He faced opposition in implementing new theological emphases and religious practices because, according to one member of the New Mennonites, "those ministers that believed in a new birth and upheld prayer meetings could not preach in the old church."[59] Consequently, he was expelled from the Mennonite Church.[60] In spite of the resistance and rejection he experienced, he held prayer meetings from 1855 to 1860,[61] which may have had a profound influence on his brother Joseph, who had a conversion experience in 1857 and joined Abraham in his ministry in 1858.[62] Christian Troyer, a minister in the Mennonite Church from Vaughan, aligned himself with Raymer's progressive group and was also expelled.[63] Another prominent figure from this area was John Steckley, a Mennonite who was converted by the preaching of Abraham Raymer in 1855.[64]

It was almost inevitable that the Hoch and Raymer groups would eventually unite, as their beliefs were virtually identical. As early as 1850, Christian Troyer approved of Daniel Hoch's views and was harshly criticized by the bishop of Markham.[65] In 1855 Troyer and Abraham Raymer attended a Mennonite conference at the Twenty Valley (now Vineland) and later attended a

58. Fuller, "Raymer, Abraham."

59. Levi Raymer to Jasper Abraham, 31 July 1915, in Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 39. Levi says he joined the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church (a descendant of the United Mennonites) in 1863. At this point it was the New Mennonites.

60. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 39–40; Fuller, "Raymer, Abraham."

61. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 40.

62. Fuller, "Raymer, Joseph." This ministry outside the church probably refers to the meetings started by his brother Abraham.

63. Burkholder, *A Brief History*, 190; Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 40.

64. Fuller, "Steckley." Huffman says that Steckley was never a member of the Mennonite Church (*History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 40), but Fuller points out that he was raised in a Mennonite family whose farm was listed as a preaching location by the Mennonite Church in 1859 (Fuller, "Steckley"). It is possible that Steckley never officially joined the Mennonite Church, but it should not be overlooked that he was firmly rooted in the Mennonite tradition in the same way as the Raymers and Christian Troyer.

65. Fuller, "Troyer, Christian."

New Mennonite revival meeting with Daniel Hoch, which Troyer enjoyed.[66] It is likely that the groups were officially united in that same year, as Abraham Raymer is said to have been (re-)ordained in 1855.[67] In 1859 his congregation expressed the desire to make him a bishop, though there is no evidence they ever did.[68]

It appears that the third and final controversy leading to the emergence of the United Mennonites in Ontario began with the construction of an Evangelical Association church building in Port Elgin, on Lake Huron, in the late 1860s. The building project was led by minister Jacob Anthes, a handful of whose letters survive and have been translated from German. On 6 September 1868 he wrote a letter to family members in which he noted that an S. Eby helped him with the construction project.[69] In two letters from 1869, one from March and one from sometime earlier, Anthes mentioned this same man preaching in his stead as part of a revival movement that led to the conversion of several Mennonites.[70] This man is likely Solomon Eby, who at that time was a Mennonite minister in Port Elgin. According to historian Jasper Abraham Huffman, following his ordination as a minister in 1858, Eby was unimpressed with the state of his congregation and even thought himself to be headed for perdition. In 1869 he made a vow to follow God's leading but around that time found

66. Fuller, "Troyer, Christian."

67. Fuller, "Raymer, Abraham."

68. Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands*, 116.

69. Jacob Anthes to Martin Anthes and Catherine Anthes, 8 September 1868, "Waterloo Country: Anthes Family Letters," University of Waterloo Library website, https://uwaterloo.ca/library/special-collections-archives/collections/digital-collections/waterloo-county-anthes-family-letters/household-economics-and-building-church.

70. Jacob Anthes to Martin Anthes and Catherine Anthes, 16 [no month] 1869, "Waterloo Country: Anthes Family Letters," University of Waterloo Library website, http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/discipline/SpecColl/anthes/several-mennonites-converted.html; Jacob Anthes, Daniel Ewald, and M. Anthes to Martin Anthes, 6 March 1869, "Waterloo Country: Anthes Family Letters," University of Waterloo Library website, https://uwaterloo.ca/library/special-collections-archives/collections/digital-collections/waterloo-county-anthes-family-letters/ewald-and-anthes-letters.

himself unable to ease the anxieties of Mennonites who had attended Evangelical Association revival meetings and came to view their own religious lives as inadequate. That year Eby "was happily converted."[71] Provided that Anthes' S. Eby is Solomon Eby, a comparison between the Anthes letters and Huffman's account allows for a more complete, though still somewhat vague, picture of Eby's religious development during the 1860s. A deeply troubled minister, in 1858 Eby befriended Anthes and helped him build his church. At some point Anthes' Methodist approach to religion probably had an impact on Eby and his congregants, likely leading Eby to have a revival-style conversion experience in 1869. Numerous times that year—perhaps even before his conversion experience—Eby assisted Anthes by preaching at Evangelical Association meetings, where Mennonites, almost assuredly Eby's congregants, had conversion experiences of their own.

Like the New Mennonite leaders, Eby decided not to join the Evangelical Association and chose rather to promote Methodist-style zeal and devotion within the Mennonite tradition. In 1870 he began having prayer meetings, and eventually most of his church was won over to his revivalism.[72] He soon came into contact with Daniel Brenneman, a like-minded Mennonite minister in Elkhart County, Indiana, who subsequently allied with Eby in his evangelistic work.[73] Both men were excommunicated and in 1874 formed a group known as the Reformed Mennonites.[74] As could be expected, this new group co-operated with the New

71. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 41–42, quotation from 42.

72. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 42.

73. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 39–43. For an autobiographical account of Brenneman's ministry and his experience with Eby's Canadian revival, see Daniel Brenneman to C. Henry Smith (location information in bibliography; note that a different version of this account is included in Wenger, "Documents on the Daniel Brenneman Division," 48–56).

74. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 46. This group is sometimes referred to as the Reforming Mennonite Society. It should not be confused with another group called the Reformed Mennonites that broke away from the Mennonite Church early in the century.

Mennonites and quickly became interested in a union with them.[75] At a conference that spanned from 23 to 25 March 1875, the two groups officially joined to form the United Mennonites of Canada, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio. They affirmed the Dordrecht Confession of Faith but also officially adopted many aspects of their emergent evangelical, revival-oriented approach to religion.[76]

Core Issues in the Emergence of the United Mennonites

The emergence of the United Mennonites in Ontario was theologically and sociologically complex, with many personalities, traditions, and doctrines coming into play. Nevertheless, a number of issues were of central importance in the separation of the dissenting groups from the Mennonite Church and their consolidation as the United Mennonites. The dissenters' decisions regarding these issues are indicative of a modified Mennonite identity that they had been forming since the beginning of the controversies. This section will identify and explain four core issues that helped form the contours and characteristics of the United Mennonites' modified Mennonite identity.[77]

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75. Steiner, "Reforming Mennonite Society."

76. "An Account of the Proceedings of the First Conference of the United Mennonites, Held at Bloomingdale, Waterloo Co. Ont., March, 1875," Mennonite Brethren in Christ fonds, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo; Steiner, "United Mennonites"; Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 151.

77. Gerber identifies eight key issues in the emergence of the MBiC, a descendant of the United Mennonites: (1) "prayer and testimony meetings," (2) "protracted (revival) meetings," (3) "evening meetings," (4) "Sunday schools," (5) "emotionalism," (6) "four part singing," (7) "role of women in the church," and (8) "English preaching" (see Gerber, "Founding Issues," 11–14). Since this article discusses not only the United Mennonites in Ontario but also other movements, both in Canada and the US, that contributed to the MBiC, not all apply to the present article. The first three are pertinent and addressed below under the subheading "Non-Traditional Religious Meetings." Sunday schools do not seem to have been an issue, but if they were, they would also fit in with the discussion of non-traditional religious meetings. Emotionalism was likely a concern, but it does not seem to have been central, and in any case it was so

Non-Traditional Religious Meetings

The prominence of meetings other than standard Sunday services, such as revival and prayer meetings, is easy to see in the history of these conflicts: Daniel Hoch led the "prayer-minded group" in his congregation, Jacob Gross attended Evangelical Association house meetings, Abraham Raymer held prayer meetings, and Solomon Eby preached at Jacob Anthes' revival meetings.[78] These meetings were of such great importance that when the New and Reformed Mennonite delegates met to discuss a union, one of the few points they discussed was the continuation of these meetings. Unsurprisingly, they agreed that they were important for the vitality of the church and should be conducted by all their congregations.[79] This decision was later confirmed in the 1880 discipline book of the Evangelical United Mennonites (a descendant of the United Mennonites), suggesting that the popularity of these meetings continued long after the initial conflicts had ended.[80]

Interestingly, there was no official disagreement about prayer meetings within the Mennonite Church. It is clear that the church leaders were not opposed to the idea of holding such meetings,

closely related to other issues discussed below (specifically non-traditional religious meetings and the calling to the ministry) that it need not be treated separately. Available evidence does not suggest that four-part singing was a serious issue in Ontario, though it was for Daniel Brenneman south of the border (see Gerber, "Founding Issues," 12; Brenneman, "Daniel Brenneman," 28; Daniel Brenneman to C. Henry Smith, 41). The same is true of the role of women and English preaching; Gerber notes that they were issues for Brenneman and, in the case of English preaching, his friend John Krupp ("Founding Issues," 12; Brenneman, "Daniel Brenneman," 28; regarding English preaching, see also Daniel Brenneman to C. Henry Smith, 42–43), but the evidence does not suggest that they were of central importance in the emergence of the United Mennonites in Ontario. This article supplements Gerber's contribution to the subject by discussing three core issues he does not include in his list.

78. For some more detailed information on the characteristics of these non-traditional religious meetings, see Gerber, "Founding Issues," 11–13.

79. "An Account of the Proceedings of the First Conference of the United Mennonites, Held at Bloomingdale, Waterloo Co. Ont., March, 1875," Mennonite Brethren in Christ fonds, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo.

80. *Doctrines and Disciplines*, 36–37.

as the conducting of prayer meetings was officially affirmed by the Mennonite Church at a conference in 1847.[81] This affirmation of prayer meetings was later confirmed by a conversation between Bishop Benjamin Eby and Daniel Hoch subsequent to Hoch's initial excommunication. Hoch believed that the ban had been issued because of his use of prayer meetings, but Eby claimed that this was not the reason.[82]

Yet, in spite of the official position of the Mennonite Church, prayer meetings, and also revival meetings, proved to be a point of great controversy. Regardless of what their leaders said, the Mennonite community at large appears to have been quite hesitant to adopt prayer meetings. A probable reason behind this resistance is suggested by the fact that the label "Methodist" was applied, probably in a derogatory way, to Daniel Hoch and to Solomon Eby's congregation in Port Elgin because they held such meetings.[83] It is likely that conservative-leaning Mennonites were concerned about Methodism entering their religious communities and altering their established norms.

While it was not quite accurate to call Hoch and Eby's congregation Methodists, those who applied this title did have a point. In holding or participating in evangelical-style meetings, Hoch and the Port Elgin Mennonites were clearly taking a step away from the established Mennonite approach to religion and toward the approach of the Evangelical Association and other such organizations. Contrary to what was probably the opinion of many conservatives, this did not entail a complete abandonment of the Mennonite way, but it did entail a modified religious life and identity. In adopting these new types of meetings, Hoch and others were grafting a new shoot onto an old Mennonite tree, producing something that was not essentially different from the Mennonite tree but was conspicuously different from its standard form.

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81. Burkholder, *A Brief History*, 46.

82. Hoch, *Disclosure of the Persecutions*, 6, 15. The real reason is given below.

83. Hoch, *Disclosure of the Persecutions*, 7, 15; Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 42.

Conversion Experiences

One common theme in the literature about the United Mennonites is the conversion experience. Lincoln County aside, there is hardly a leader in the United Mennonite movement who is not said to have had such an experience. The centrality of such experiences for the United Mennonites is confirmed by the fact that they asserted the importance of conversion experiences at the meeting in which the United Mennonites were officially established.[84] The term "conversion experience" has the potential to cause confusion, as Mennonites have always asserted the importance of making a mature decision to reject sin and follow Christ, an idea that is quite easily associated with the concept of conversion. However, the Mennonite decision to follow Christ, normally followed by an outward profession of faith in believer's baptism, appears not to be the conversion spoken of in the literature about or penned by the United Mennonites. These conversion experiences are often described as taking place long after adolescence and therefore probably long after people made a mature decision to follow Christ and be baptized. In fact, Solomon Eby, Ulrich Geiger, and quite probably Abraham Raymer had this experience following their ordination in the Mennonite Church. The kind of conversion spoken of in these sources seems to be that conceptualized in evangelicalism, an experience in which one becomes intensely penitent and then finds a sense of assurance of one's salvation and a drastic increase in religious vigor.[85]

Probably most of these experiences were spurred on by evangelicals or Mennonites influenced by evangelicalism. For example, Solomon Eby's conversion experience almost certainly had something to do with his friendship with Jacob Anthes, and Joseph Raymer's conversion may have been inspired by the preaching of his brother Abraham. It is possible that in some

84. Steiner, "United Mennonites."

85. This description is my own, but see also Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 40. Interestingly, over time, dramatic conversion experiences became less popular in Ontario Methodism (Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 77). For an Anglican view of conversion that contrasts with the one typical of nineteenth-century evangelicalism, see pp. 98–99.

cases the conversion experiences spoken of were not understood as such at the time and were later interpreted according to the evangelical understanding of conversion. However, since the emergence of the United Mennonites throughout Ontario was so often associated with interaction with evangelicals, it is unlikely that this happened often; those who had the experiences probably knew about evangelical conversion experiences and were likely quick to interpret events in their own devotional lives according to evangelical ideas. In any case the fact that the formative meeting of the United Mennonites included an affirmation of conversion experiences suggests that by this time the United Mennonites believed in this important evangelical idea.

In adopting the evangelical concept of the conversion experience, the United Mennonites were, of course, incorporating into their religious life and identity another core aspect of evangelicalism and revivalism and were taking a step away from the established Mennonite identity. The old Mennonite tree had yet another foreign shoot grafted onto it. But the significance for the United Mennonite identity was larger than that. In addition to the theological implications of affirming evangelical conversion experiences, there must have been profound sociological implications that led to further alterations to the United Mennonites' sense of identity. In any community, conversion experiences provide a way of dividing the population into two categories: those who have had the experience and those who have not. This bifurcation can easily cross more standard divisions of the population, leading to a new understanding of social divisions. This dividing of the population was probably a factor in many of the United Mennonites' sense of identity, both before and after leaving or being excluded from the Mennonite Church. Considering the case of John Steckley illustrates how such a new understanding could have been constructed based on conversion experiences. Prior to his conversion experience, Steckley most likely thought of himself as part of the traditional Mennonite community, a bearer of the old Mennonite identity in the New World. However, following his conversion experience, he likely became aware that this new important fact about himself distinguished him from most of his fellow "old" Mennonites and gave him

something in common with Christians outside the Mennonite church, including Methodists and New Mennonites. It is likely that such a change had something to do with his decision to join the New Mennonites. The United Mennonites probably experienced something similar on the community level. They were distinguished from the "old" Mennonite community by their conversion experiences, and they were connected with evangelical churches, many of whose members claimed the same type of experience. Therefore, in having and affirming conversion experiences, they were contributing to their emerging new Mennonite identity another core concept of evangelicalism and, most likely, a sense of solidarity with evangelicals of other traditions.

Open Communion

One important characteristic of the Mennonite Church at this time was its strict observance of closed communion, which restricted the administration of this sacrament to members of the church. This appears to have been the result of the Mennonites' denunciation of other religious traditions, because on one occasion the practice was justified on the grounds that "those who take communion together shall be as one in doctrine and in life."[86] It is also easy to see how the Mennonites' anxiety about preserving their tradition would also have strengthened this belief. If the Mennonites welcomed others into their services and shared communion with them, they may have found it difficult, over time, to distinguish who was a Mennonite and who was not. The power of this conviction is clearly displayed in the original ban of Daniel Hoch, which Benjamin Eby issued because he erroneously thought that Hoch advocated open communion.[87]

Although Daniel Hoch supported closed communion, other dissenting Mennonites were committed to the practice of open communion.[88] The ecumenical spirit closely related to the open

86. Hoch, *Disclosure of the Persecutions*, 11.

87. Hoch, *Disclosure of the Persecutions*, 6.

88. For some, open communion refers to the allowance of all *baptized* persons to receive the elements. Such people may think that the allowance of unbaptized persons to take communion is a different view that deserves a

position made itself evident very early in the controversies: Samuel Schlichter preached at a meeting house shared by other Protestant groups, Abraham Raymer "preached wherever opportunity offered,"[89] and Solomon Eby preached at Evangelical Association meetings. In 1855 a number of preachers, including John McNally, left the New Mennonites because of Hoch's opposition to open communion, but a solution must have been reached, as McNally returned two years later.[90] Interestingly, around 1855 John Steckley of York County joined the New Mennonites instead of the Tunkers because he wanted a church that advocated open communion.[91] It is likely that the New Mennonites of York County maintained a practice of open communion during this period while those in counties to the south, being closer to Hoch and therefore more influenced by his ideas, experienced controversy over this point. In any case, the open position decisively won out on 5 March 1872, when York County's Joseph Raymer proposed a motion that outlined how communion was to be administered and received. The minutes of this meeting record that the sacrament was available to "all members [and] others in Christ-Jesus who have decided to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper."[92]

This was not a case of the United Mennonites coming to accept and espouse a core, universally held aspect of evangelicalism, as not all evangelicals practiced open communion.[93] However, to view the United Mennonites' acceptance of open communion solely in relation to the practice of evangelical

different name. In this essay I do not use the term "open communion" according to this understanding but refer to it generally as the allowance of people of other churches to partake of the elements.

89. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 40.

90. Fuller, "McNally, John Kinzel."

91. Fuller, "Steckley"; Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 40.

92. "New Mennonite Society of the County of York and Ontario (1864–1881)," meeting minutes, p. 5, Box 1010, Missionary Church Historical Trust Archives, Emmanuel Bible College. The word "and" is supplied here where a hole has made a word illegible. I am quite certain that "and" is the correct word.

93. See, e.g., Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 160.

groups would be to miss much of the significance here. When they considered the question of open or closed communion, the United Mennonites were almost certainly thinking primarily of sharing communion with the evangelicals who participated with them in revival meetings and other such gatherings. Therefore, the decision to accept open communion was a decision to affirm in emphatic terms their spiritual kinship with evangelicals who were not part of the Mennonite tradition. This meant not only a shift toward a more evangelical- and revival-friendly way of practicing religion but a modification of their religious identity that encouraged them to think of themselves not in contrast to non-Mennonite evangelicals but in conjunction with them.

Church Governance and the Calling to Ministry

The Mennonites during this period used an episcopal model of church governance. It included the office of deacon, which involved service; the office of minister, which involved preaching at meetings; and the office of bishop or elder, which involved officiation.[94] It appears that in Ontario each county had one bishop to supervise the affairs of the Mennonites in that area. However, a bishop from another area would exercise "bishop oversight" when a group of congregations was still in the process of choosing its own.[95]

The selection of ministers was, for the most part, a local affair. Members of the congregation could be nominated for the offices, and if there were more nominees than available positions, the final decision as to who would be ordained was entrusted to the will of God by casting lots.[96] It is noteworthy that in historian Frank Epp's description of this practice, there is no mention of a sense of divine calling to ministry. In fact, it is unclear whether nominees had any say at all in their nomination and ordination. Sometimes this method yielded unfortunate results; occasionally a minister would prove to be poorly fit for his job, and sometimes families would nominate their own kin in order to

94. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 115.
95. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 118.
96. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 115.

exert their influence in the church.[97] One example of this system's weakness is found in the early ministry of Solomon Eby, who at that point felt ill-equipped to be a minister. In an event mentioned above, his feelings were proven to be true when members of his congregation met with him, fearing that their religious life did not meet the biblical standards. Despite his position of authority, Eby was unable to assist them, because he felt the same way and had struggled with gaining assurance of salvation for years.[98]

The United Mennonites appear to have had the same basic structure of church governance. The episcopal system was more or less maintained, though the title "minister" was changed to "elder," and the title "bishop" to "presiding elder."[99] The nomination of elders seems to have gone in a similar fashion, with the very probable exception of lots. In one instance a minister was ordained at a meeting in York County with the unanimous support of those present.[100] In another meeting it was suggested that Joseph Raymer be ordained. The idea was officially proposed after the next Sunday service and was unanimously affirmed.[101] However, there is one key difference between the United Mennonites' system and that of the "old" Mennonite Church. The United Mennonites thought it essential that a minister feel a special calling from God to preach the gospel.[102] When the New and Reformed Mennonites met to officiate their union, they decided

97. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 116.

98. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren*, 41–42.

99. Specifics of these roles can be found in *Doctrines and Disciplines*, 63–65, 69–72. There were other roles as well, such as deacon (*Doctrines and Disciplines*, 60–62, 66–68), class leader (65–66), and local preacher (68–69).

100. "New Mennonite Society of the County of York and Ontario (1864–1881)," meeting minutes, p. 8, Box 1010, Missionary Church Historical Trust Archives, Emmanuel Bible College.

101. "New Mennonite Society of the County of York and Ontario (1864–1881)," meeting minutes, p. 13, Box 1010, Missionary Church Historical Trust Archives, Emmanuel Bible College.

102. Gerber, in speaking broadly of the history of the MBiC, refers to a time "when the progressives turned to 'the call' as the method of identifying those chosen by God to minister" ("Founding Issues," 14), but he does not go into further detail.

that a preacher must have "convictions that he has a call from the Lord to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[103] Years later, the Evangel United Mennonites, a descendant of the United Mennonites, preserved this belief in their discipline book. This book includes a series of questions to be presented at the ordination service of an elder, the first of which is the following: "Do you feel inwardly persuaded that you are moved upon by the Holy Ghost to take upon you the office of the ministry of the Gospel, to serve God in the Church of Christ, to the honor and glory of His holy name?"[104] This emphasis is further confirmed by the minutes for a conference meeting in 1877, two years after the formation of the United Mennonites, in which deacons Peter Pike and Abraham Stauffer stated that they did not feel called to preach and would therefore support the ministry instead.[105] It is also noteworthy that, according to historian L. J. Burkholder, Abraham Raymer began to preach because of a personal call.[106]

The United Mennonites' insistence on a prospective preacher feeling a divine call signified a drastic change from the established Mennonite ways. Whereas the "old" church employed a reserved approach to Christianity that made no attempts "to stir the depths of individual religious feeling"[107] and that sought divine guidance through the casting of lots, the United Mennonites not only elevated and valued subjective, often emotional experience but also treated it as a means of discerning God's will and therefore of governing the church. Beyond the issue of church governance, this elevation of the subjective must have brought with it a different way of viewing God's providential action in the world and a different way of relating to him. Of course, this

103. "An Account of the Proceedings of the First Conference of the United Mennonites, Held at Bloomingdale, Waterloo Co. Ont., March, 1875," Mennonite Brethren in Christ fonds, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo.

104. *Doctrines and Disciplines*, 58.

105. New Mennonite Society of the County of York and Ontario (1864–1881)," meeting minutes, p. 33, Box 1010, Missionary Church Historical Trust Archives, Emmanuel Bible College.

106. Burkholder, *A Brief History*, 180.

107. Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, 607.

new way was surely learned from evangelicals, most of them probably Methodists, who were notable, especially in the early years of the nineteenth century, for their highly emotional meetings.[108] So, in asserting the importance of sensing a divine call, the United Mennonites were voicing their support for a more evangelical and less Mennonite (at least in that place and time) way of thinking about ministry, church governance, and, more broadly, God and his way of relating to creation. Again, this change did not entail an abandonment of the Mennonite way, but it did entail an incorporation of important evangelical ideas into the United Mennonites' theology, life, and, surely, sense of identity.

Conclusion

For the Mennonites of nineteenth-century Ontario, the strong presence of evangelicalism made necessary some important decisions about how they would relate to their neighbors. Would they mostly resist the influence of evangelical religion, affirming and strengthening the Mennonite identity as it had been previously defined in the States, or would they welcome aspects of evangelicalism and revivalism and modify their Mennonite identity, perhaps diminishing or reinterpreting certain concepts such as separation from the "world" and incorporating evangelical or evangelical-style beliefs and practices into their own religious lives? Some, such as Dilman Moyer, took the former approach, and the United Mennonites took the latter; they forged a modified Mennonite identity that incorporated elements that were borrowed from or favorable to evangelicalism and revivalism, in particular the use of non-traditional religious meetings, the affirmation and encouragement of conversion experiences, the adoption of open communion, and the belief in a divine call to ministry. This identity, essentially Mennonite yet noticeably evangelical or, at the very least, extremely friendly to evangelicalism, allowed old Mennonite convictions to be lived out in a new way. The exposition of Menno Simons' pacifist teaching

108. Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 54–66.

would be greeted with Methodist-style "amens." A sense of calling to ministry would lead long-bearded and plainly clothed Mennonite farmers to preach the Christian message and encourage people to commit to the kind of discipleship the early Anabaptists spoke of centuries earlier.

In some sense the United Mennonites were pioneers. In becoming conversant with evangelicalism and incorporating certain evangelical and revival-centered ideas into their own religious lives, they, along with their like-minded innovators south of the border, were taking the basic approach of the many Mennonites who in later years became friendly with evangelicalism and in some cases joined its ranks.[109] Of equal importance, the Ontario United Mennonites were among those who carried the Mennonite tradition into the evangelical world. Revival meetings had among their leaders and participants those who subscribed to the Dordrecht Confession and were visibly members of the Mennonite tradition. Through the ministry of men such as Abraham Raymer and Solomon Eby, Menno Simons was brought into conversation with Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. In this sense, the United Mennonites, in creating this new identity, became religious trailblazers who perhaps influenced mainstream evangelicalism and certainly helped open up and establish new pathways for ecumenical conversation and participation as they lived out their Mennonite faith in new and lively ways.

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109. For information on Canadian Mennonites and evangelicalism, see Guenther, "Living with the Virus," 223–40.

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