The Convergence of Old Colony Mennonites, Evangelicalism and Contemporary Canadian Culture: A Case Study of Osler Mission Chapel (1974-1994)[1]

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In November 1974 approximately 70 individuals living north of Saskatoon decided to leave the Old Colony Mennonite Church. The event marked the largest exodus out of the Old Colony (hereafter OC) church in Saskatchewan.[2] They organized a congregation in Osler that became known as Osler Mission Chapel (hereafter OMC), and that has, in spite of its eventual affiliation with the Chortizer Mennonite Conference (hereafter CMC) of Manitoba, functioned largely as an autonomous congregation. During its first twenty years of existence OMC has grown to more than 240 active baptized members along with several hundred adherents. It quickly and decisively rejected many OC practices and emphases. In their stead theological emphases and practices that leaders had become familiar with through contact with evangelical publications, travelling speakers, radio broadcasts, transdenominational Bible schools and Bible camps during the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were substituted.

The history of OMC serves as a crucible in which one can observe the convergence of two religious and cultural worlds. This article examines the changes among the people of OMC as they moved away from OC traditions and aligned themselves with many of the emphases and practices found within North American evangelical Protestantism.[3] Considered a spiritual awakening by the individuals involved, unacknowledged in this transition were many underlying sociological and cultural impulses. Although the OC Mennonites who formed OMC comprise only a small minority of Mennonites in Canada, their attraction towards, and their utilization of, evangelicalism is representative. The story of OMC offers insight to the larger questions of why Mennonite groups have historically been, and continue to be, attracted to North American evangelicalism, and how it, alongside other forces, facilitated and accelerated the process of acculturation.[4]

Old Colony Mennonite Distinctives

Prior to analysing the development of OMC I will highlight the distinctive practices and beliefs of OC Mennonites in Saskatchewan, and some of the transitions that took place prior to 1974. OC Mennonites used a dialect called Plautdietsch (Low-German) among themselves reserving the more formal High German as the language of the church. The OC tried to give their children basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. However, education beyond an elementary level was deemed unnecessary and even undesirable. As a result, until the 1960s few obtained more than a grade eight education.

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

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

Central within OC communities was the church, a plain and until recently unpainted building—a visible sign of humility. Men and women use separate entrances and are seated apart on long benches which were, until the 1960s, without backs. Worship services generally last two or more hours and consist of a combination of singing, silent prayers, an "introduction" and a lengthy

sermon. Behaviour within the church is noticeably subdued reflecting the veneration given to the place of worship.

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

Seated on the other side of the pulpit also facing the congregation are the ministers. Theoretically all members of the OC community are considered equal but ministers, as the spokespersons for God, are given a considerable degree of respect and power.[5] Any male is eligible to be chosen as a minister—a position held for life without remuneration. Although ministers are selected from local congregations they serve the entire OC church by taking their place in the "circuit," a preaching rotation encompassing all congregations in the area. Formal training for clergy is considered unnecessary. Hand-copied sermons handed down through successive generations are read: eye-contact with the congregation and expressive motions with hands or shoulders are avoided while preaching. The bishop, who is elected from among the ministers by the brotherhood (all baptized males), is the undisputed leader. He alone administers the rites of communion and baptism.

Church membership is attained by baptism after a period of catechetical instruction. Theoretically members join the church voluntarily; in reality it became a social necessity as a prerequisite for marriage. The necessity of being baptized prior to being considered a member of the church and able to participate in communion led some to hold a view that resembles baptismal regeneration. While eschewed by their catechism many OC people also developed, at least implicitly, a sacramental view of communion that is manifested by the special deference given its bi-annual observance. The church has no written constitution: the catechism is the full extent of its explication of doctrine. Rules are unwritten and interpreted by church leaders based upon their understanding of OC traditions. Despite the ambiguity and differing opinions over the years concerning the definition of worldliness, leaders agree that the church ought to be separate, i.e., recognizably distinct from "the world." Deviance is understood as a manifestation of worldliness: cultural accommodation and theological innovation is averted by the threat of excommunication and social ostracism.

The early OC Mennonites in Saskatchewan were almost exclusively farmers. Many—not all—initially settled in communal villages as they had done in Manitoba during the 1870s. Responsible for the administration of each village was the *Schultze* (administrator). Despite being elected by the landowners of the village, his authority was subordinate to the church which used the threat of excommunication to ensure conformity in both civil and religious

matters. Various forces combined to prompt the gradual disintegration of these village settlements: the desire for greater economic independence on the part of individual family units was usually a factor. Although some continued to live within the villages, the communal system that accompanied it vanished by the early twentieth century as OC farmers increasingly preferred to reside on their own property.[6]

Several additional forces converged to elicit change among OC Mennonites. First, the acceptance of technology gradually weakened the boundaries of rural isolation. Although OC leaders initially banned those who acquired motor-driven vehicles, this prohibition was short-lived. OC leaders correctly anticipated that the versatility and increased mobility that automobiles offered would constitute a threat to their segregated way of life. But cars did not have a major impact until the late 1950s when the combination of improved roads and vehicles facilitated convenient access to urban centres.

There appear to have been few inhibitions in utilizing labour-saving technological advances that would enhance the economic viability of farming operations. Many farms had electricity installed during the 1950s (it was eventually installed in church buildings during the late 1960s), and radios, which brought the voices of the world directly into OC homes, were widely accepted (television was resisted more vigorously). The openness towards technology displayed by Saskatchewan OC Mennonites contrasts with the resistance characterizing those who migrated to Mexico. The migrations to Mexico during the 1920s siphoned away the stronger leaders which accentuated a slackening of discipline and practice among those remaining in Canada. Those who stayed behind were, therefore, more vulnerable to cultural accommodation.

Second, by the 1950s the land base in the Saskatoon area surrounding the original land reserves was no longer able to support the growing population of OC Mennonites. The available on-farm jobs diminished with increased mechanization. As a result, many sought employment in urban areas but the lack of formal education usually limited them to blue-collar occupations. The desire to avoid having their young people work outside the community prompted a search for additional land in suitably isolated locations. Migrations designed to minimize contact with outside influences took place to northern Alberta during the 1930s and 40s, and to northern British Columbia during the 1960s. This again decimated leadership in Saskatchewan. Those who remained had little choice but to look for outside employment which exposed members to different lifestyle options. Because the OC church strongly disapproved of members actually living in urban centres an alternative bedroom community (now known as Martensville) emerged north of Saskatoon. It kept blue-collar OC families from living in Saskatoon while allowing them easy access to their jobs.[7] Pressure from employers annoyed by the lack of uniformity between national and OC religious holidays prompted some OC members to disregard certain traditions. Such pressure gradually diminished their visible distinctiveness.

Third, over time OC members lost their ability to use High German, the language of the church. Although Low German continues to be spoken in homes, the impact of English language public schools, and the necessity of using English in the workplace, weakened the resolve of individual members to retain the German language. Sunday schools were introduced during the 1940s both as a vehicle for the Christian education of children and to teach the upcoming generation the language of the church. The combination of poor curriculum, unqualified instructors and insufficient hours of instruction did little to reverse the trend among the younger generation in preferring the English language. By the mid-1960s, a combination of English and Low German was used for instruction in OC Sunday Schools.

Fourth, during the migration of OC Mennonites to Mexico in the 1920s, many sold land to incoming Mennonites from Russia. These *Russlaender* Mennonites were better educated and more interested in integrating into Canadian society. Participation in the programs offered by their churches (e.g., *Jugendvereine*—evening meetings for young people usually held on Sunday), and the impact of inter-marriage led to direct contact between different Mennonite groups and resulted in a steady trickle of young people out of the OC church.[8] The inability to explain adequately the theological basis for their beliefs and practices hindered OC members from withstanding outreach efforts organized by evangelical Mennonite groups like the Rudnerweider (later renamed the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference), a movement that began in 1936 as a major schism from the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church.[9] Even for those OC Mennonites who did not interact directly with the *Russlaenders*, religious pluralism had a subtle effect. The economic success and apparently sincere religiosity of neighbouring Mennonites mitigated against the OC assumptions that faithfulness to God meant separation from the world, and that more acculturated Mennonites had been forsaken by God.

As the world around them changed, OC leaders reluctantly permitted an increasing level of cultural accommodation. The inability to maintain complete insularity from "the world" did, as suspected, jeopardise their distinctive way of life. The only real options were either to initiate yet another migration or maintain control over the pace of change.[10] But regardless of changes taking place on farms, homes and schools, OC leaders rigorously maintained their adherence to traditional practices within the church: here *das Alte festhalten* became an obsession. Once part of a strategy for keeping "worldliness" at bay, the obdurate resistance to change became the *raison d'être* of their religious system. Maintaining consistency in matters of faith and church practice provided a sense of stability and security in a rapidly changing world. As memories of the two world wars faded, and the preoccupation with preserving particular practices increased, the ability of leaders to instill an understanding of, and a commitment to, distinctives like nonresistance diminished. Moreover, efforts to maintain religious practices as static as possible disabled the OC

from revitalizing their traditions to meet new circumstances. The priority given to the preservation of religious customs without regard for their original purpose or present impact was a major catalyst precipitating the OMC schism.[11]

The Birth of Osler Mission Chapel

The birth of OMC in 1974 centred around a young OC minister named Jake Wiebe who had been ordained four years prior. Although he had received a box of frequently used sermons from the bishop, Wiebe opted instead to preach extemporaneously from his Bible. His disregard for tradition was made worse by an evangelical emphasis on the necessity of a conversion experience and on the doctrine of assurance of salvation which contrasted with the OC understanding of salvation as the acceptance by God of a faithful community.[12] While it was customary for OC ministers to speak of *bekjeare* (to be converted), it was commonly understood that matters of faith were private. Genuine faith would manifest itself in good works (i.e., conformity to OC traditions and distinct way of life). Moreover, to claim "assurance of salvation" was evidence of spiritual pride.[13]

Despite his departures from tradition, Wiebe was supported by many in the pews. The bishop, and the other ministers, disapproved of Wiebe's innovations: his popularity threatened their collective authority. Matters came to a head on Saturday, 2 November 1974 when Bishop Enns informed Wiebe by telephone that he had been suspended from preaching indefinitely until "things would improve."

The other families involved in OMC had additional reasons for leaving. All were dissatisfied with the rigorous OC resistance to change: they desired reforms but were frustrated by Bishop Enns' refusal to call a brotherhood meeting to discuss matters. Some were concerned about the absence of programs for their children who were entering adolescence and were decidedly uninterested in church. Others wanted the Bible to be studied more openly.

On Sunday, 3 November 1974, twelve families gathered somewhat apprehensively in the home of Jake and Anne Wiebe in Martensville for a time of worship. One week later, the same group, along with a few additional individuals, held a similar service in the home of Peter and Mary Guenther near Hepburn. For some, participating in these renegade services required considerable courage: it meant fracturing familial loyalties and friendships which, in some cases, resulted in long-term alienation from parents and siblings.

Within two weeks, the group had become sufficiently organized to rent a small hall in the village of Osler in which they met for worship until March 1976.[14] On 18 November 1974 a brotherhood meeting was convened to further the process of organization.[15] Choices concerning the structure of Sunday morning worship services marked an immediate and decisive departure from OC practices: segregated seating was abrogated; they concurred that services

should be bilingual with English being the primary language; a list of ordained ministers from neighbouring churches were invited to preach, and arrangements were made to conduct a one-half hour Sunday School prior to the Sunday morning service. Former *Vorsaenger* were asked to lead congregational singing. Plans were made to inaugurate a regular Bible study for adults, a church library and a youth program for teens.

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

Back to the Bible

One of the central defining characteristics of evangelicalism is its devotion to the Bible.[16] The strong biblicism of evangelicalism was particularly appealing after struggling for years to reform a religious system that refused to permit the open study of the Bible. Allowing individuals to interpret the Bible threatened to destroy the collective unity of the OC by challenging the validity of traditional practices and even the personal authority of the bishop. OC people generally assumed that their beliefs and practices, and the authority of their ministers, were based on the Bible: interpretations rendered by ministers were considered authoritative and were not to be challenged. In actual practice, the Bible was seldom consulted and had become an unfamiliar book to most.

An emphasis on the study of the Bible has been from the outset a central feature of OMC. Within months of the schism, the group inaugurated a mid-week Bible study and prayer meeting for all adults as well as bi-weekly Bible studies for youth. Attendance was strongly encouraged. The influence of literature produced by organizations like Back to the Bible (which featured the voice of Theodore Epp, a General Conference Mennonite from Oklahoma), Radio Bible Class (founded in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1938 by M.R. DeHaan) and the personnel from transdenominational Bible schools who emphasized the "priesthood of all believers," encouraged people to read the Bible for themselves. Diminishing the gulf between clergy and laity had a profoundly democratizing effect within the new congregation. The freedom to offer their own views inspired a sense of confidence in challenging fossilized OC traditions and in forging their own religious destiny. Moreover, regular participation in Bible studies increased considerably the level of biblical literacy among older OMC members.

Despite their consistent emphasis on the importance of studying the Bible and the verbal assent given to the belief that the Holy Spirit guides each individual "into all truth," OMC leaders hesitated when a group of young married couples and single adults suggested the inauguration of home Bible studies during the early 1980s. The idea was strongly discouraged with the rationale that it would lead to theological disharmony and fragmentation. As pressure mounted, OMC leaders responded by offering a series of Bible studies for young couples led by one of the ministers.[17] In 1985, permission was again requested to organize home Bible studies. This time it was "allowed" on a trial basis with the caveat that these studies be supervised by the ministerial. The assumptions about the necessity of retaining clerical control to preserve theological uniformity, and the unwillingness to modify the structure of their mid-week Bible study were, ironically, reminiscent of OC attitudes that had once been condemned by the leaders of OMC. The sheer number of young couples, and the practical impossibility of having all potential groups supervised by the ministers, gradually led the Administration Board (hereafter AB) to relinquish control and to encourage lay people in such initiatives.

The people of OMC generally employ a simple "common-sense," literal approach for interpreting the Bible. However, the general lack of awareness of how culturally determined biases operate within the hermeneutical process resulted in the preservation of certain practices derived from their OC background that would not be endorsed as biblical by most evangelical Protestants. A case in point is the way in which women are not only considered ineligible for leadership positions (a view shared by many evangelicals) but also excluded from participating in the decision-making process at the congregational level. The fact that the CMC constitution does not proscribe such participation, and that OMC leaders were unwilling to provide a "biblical" defense for the policy, indicates that OC cultural values sometimes still

determine the construction of church policies. Naivety about the interpretative process also resulted in some careless appeals to the Bible to discourage activities like the use of puppets and drama, and to heighten the legitimacy and status of views that are based more on personal tastes and cultural preferences than on a credible reading of the biblical texts.[18]

Osler "Mission" Chapel

Also characteristic of evangelicalism is its impulse towards activism. Outlets for this energy have historically taken the form of philanthropic efforts, political crusades, and particularly evangelistic and missionary endeavours. OMC signalled from the outset its endorsement of "missions" by intentionally including the term in their name. Towards this end, a "Missions Board" was formed in the fall of 1976. Faithful to its stated intention, OMC has put an enormous amount of its energy and resources towards the support of missionary work in Canada and around the world. At least 50-65% of its annual budget has consistently been designated towards an impressive list of individual missionaries and mission agencies.

In addition to being an outlet for their evangelistic zeal, the emphasis on missions served as a catalyst that legitimized and accelerated change.[19] From the outset missionaries were regularly invited to speak. In addition to observing such services in other evangelical churches in the area, such meetings were an extension of a practice initiated prior to the advent of OMC by a community Ladies Aid group that included a number of the women who were later involved in OMC.[20] Initially, the OMC group sought out Mennonite missionaries with whom they were personally acquainted. However, contact with non-denominational mission agencies soon led them beyond their ethnic boundaries. Frequently visiting missionaries wished to use slides to enhance their presentation. During their first year in the rented hall in Osler, this was not considered a problem. However, upon joining the CMC Bishop Henry K. Schellenberg explicitly cautioned against the use of "musical instruments, films and slides."[21] This admonition, together with the deeply-rooted reverence and awe given to a place of worship within the OC tradition, and the suspicion of the medium on the part of some as worldly, culminated in a resolution that slides not be shown in the OMC sanctuary. Missionary presentations utilizing slides were relegated to the church basement. However, within four years this resolution was challenged. The construction of classrooms and poor ventilation made basement meetings unbearably crowded and uncomfortable. After several deferrals, the decision banning slides from the sanctuary was unanimously reversed in September 1980. The priority of missions took precedence over retaining customs once held sacred.

The interest and commitment to missions is an important factor behind OMC's openness towards post-secondary education, particularly to certain

transdenominational Bible schools. The church early on adopted a policy of assisting Bible school students with their tuition to encourage attendance. In 1990 the OMC Missions Board began subsidizing the cost of attending weekend youth retreats organized by Bible schools and colleges to encourage high school students to attend.

Shortly after the start of OMC, members who could afford to do so began participating in travel tours organized by mission agencies to places like Haiti and Bolivia. This was their first experience in international travel and was explicitly legitimated by its connection to "missions." This exposure to diverse cultures, to different practices within evangelicalism, and to more leisure-oriented lifestyles, furthered the process of acculturation. Although travel for the primary purpose of leisure and relaxation is still seen by some as suspiciously "secular," many no longer share this inhibition.

The evangelical mandate to fulfil the "Great Commission" along with the emphasis on a spiritual unity that transcends all differences under which ethnic and theological distinctives must be subsumed created a certain dissonance within the group. The omission of "Mennonite" in the name "Osler Mission Chapel" was intended to minimize the importance of an ethnic "Mennonitism" and highlight their apparent inclusiveness and evangelistic intentions. Suggestions by CMC leaders that OMC highlight Mennonite distinctives like nonresistance are ignored and considered unimportant over against the greater task of evangelism. Despite efforts to subordinate their Mennonite ethnicity to their priority on missions and outreach, this congregation has attracted very few people who are not ethnic Mennonites even though demographic changes in the district indicate an influx of non-Mennonite people. Numerical increases in the size of the congregation have largely (not entirely) been gained from biological growth, and by attracting people from the more traditional Mennonite groups. Mennonite ethnicity remains an integral, but unacknowledged, factor in the congregational life of OMC. This is implicitly acknowledged by discussions of their niche within the local Christian community. While OMC leaders consider the "Great Commission" to be a global mandate to communicate the gospel to every culture, their local emphasis remains narrowly focused on "reaching OC and Bergthaler people." On the one hand, this rationale reflects a sensible pragmatism regarding the cultural realities within OMC; on the other hand, it has been used to legitimize resistance and check the pace of additional cultural changes within the church.

An Ongoing Ambivalence Towards Culture

A long history of persecution, and deliberate geographic and cultural isolation on the part of OC Mennonites, gave them a special affinity for the evangelical motif of "being in the world" but not "of the world." Years of

persecution initially forced Anabaptists to live in segregated enclaves. This led many Mennonite groups to believe that the "world" was essentially wicked, and that life is a brief (unpleasant) sojourn with a reward elsewhere. Over time, these enclaves nurtured a deliberate insularity from surrounding cultures; Mennonite groups like the OC came to prefer the geographical separation that allowed them to preserve their distinct language, faith and ethnic identity. A "static dualistic nature of reality" emerged: there is a kingdom of God and a kingdom of this world, and one ought not to encourage any intercourse or communication between these worlds.[22]

A similar dualistic ambivalence towards culture is present within certain corners of North American evangelicalism.[23] This came about during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as evangelicalism, the dominant religious ideology in America at the time, saw its influence rapidly wane. In response to forces it could no longer control, evangelicals became defensive and retreated from the cultural and intellectual mainstream. Despite vigorous attempts to defend "fundamental doctrines"—hence the term fundamentalism—evangelicals became a beleaguered minority. The rise of dispensational premillennialism, which helped evangelicals depict themselves as a holy remnant, further accentuated a cultural pessimism and withdrawal.[24] Although some evangelicals looked for opportunities to bring America back to its "Christian" heritage, other evangelicals essentially made separatism an article of faith. As a result, evangelicals built a vast subculture from which many did not emerge until mid-century. Sometimes called "neo-evangelicals," those desirous of re-entering the cultural mainstream nevertheless continued to feel the influence of separatistic tendencies cultivated earlier.[25] Although the influence of a militant and separatistic fundamentalism is not as pronounced in Canada as in the United States, John Stackhouse discerns a similar "sectish" *mentalité* within Canadian evangelicalism (particularly within certain Bible schools) that manifests a suspicion or hostility towards "modern" ideas.[26]

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

Having set in motion the process of change in the fall of 1974 the innovations within OMC continued. A standard pattern became evident: aspects of previously disallowed practices are quickly endorsed creating an

immediate sense of emancipation and "progress." At the same time, a certain resistance, an innate fear and suspicion of worldliness, kept some OC customs and attitudes intact and other commonly accepted practices within Protestantism from being fully accepted. Many of these practices have subsequently been permitted as the desire for, and in some cases the pressure for, a greater degree of acculturation intensified.

(1) The most visible forum within which change can be observed is in the structure and format of worship services. These gradually came to resemble closely those of neighbouring evangelical churches as extemporaneous public prayers, offerings, ushers, bulletins, and the participation of lay people as readers and even preachers became common.

Changes in the music used during services provide some significant examples of the simultaneous dynamic of acceptance and resistance. Immediately after leaving the OC church, OMC began using English hymnals with standard musical notation. Although the OC *Gesangbuch* was still used occasionally, people preferred the tunes and faster tempo of gospel songs that spoke more directly about the Christian's personal experience than did the hymns of the *Gesangbuch*. With help from a music teacher from Bethany Bible Institute, a Mennonite Brethren school located in Hepburn, many learned how to sing harmonies which enhanced congregational singing. Youth groups were encouraged to form choirs both as a means for learning how to sing as well as for participating in church services.

Within several months of their genesis, the question of musical instruments for accompaniment was raised; it was agreed that it should be permitted "as long as this was done with moderation." Initially this did not include Sunday worship services: a small electric portable organ was used during mid-week Bible studies and during evening services. However, shortly after the completion of OMC's first building project in 1976, the matter of purchasing a church organ was raised. After several deferrals, it was finally decided in October 1976 to install an organ for a six-month experimental period: the use of other instruments remained prohibited.[27] Once installed there was never any question again about prohibiting the use of an organ; in fact, obtaining approval for a piano quickly became the next objective.

Leaders of OMC wrestled also with the question of where song leaders should sit during a service. According to OC customs, the proper place was next to the pulpit facing the congregation. OMC song leaders preferred instead to sit with their families. The weight of tradition made this relatively innocuous request a matter that had to be discussed with the bishop before receiving approval by the brotherhood in 1980.

By the mid-1980s the "liturgy" of OMC had been determined. Having established its own conventions changes were difficult to achieve. Subsequent innovations frequently became a battleground between older and younger members of the congregation. Persistent requests did eventually result in greater flexibility in the format of services and in the acceptance of a variety of

new practices. For example, during the summer of 1987, "clapping during the singing of choruses" was deemed acceptable. In 1989 a time was specifically designated for singing contemporary "choruses" instead of the hymns that once had been considered an innovation. The acceptance of a more contemporary style of music was accompanied by pressure to use additional instruments. By 1991, even drums, which once were considered incommensurable with "Christian" music, were in use.

(2) The same pattern of acceptance and reticence was displayed in the practices that were either forbidden or permitted within the church facility. The church, particularly the "sanctuary," was considered "the house of God," a hallowed place in which all activities should be respectfully subdued. The sanctioning of slide presentations proved to be merely the proverbial thin edge of the wedge—as partially illustrated by the acceptance of different musical instruments.

At the outset, OMC refused even to advertise films in church. Only ten years later OMC leaders presented a James Dobson "Focus on the Famiy" film series in the main sanctuary. This event was designated an "outreach ministry": the nomenclature is not accidental for it helped members of OMC to overcome their opposition to films—an aversion that was based on a kind of guilt by association with "secular" movies—and to legitimize the activity as something that could also take place within the church.

Somewhat more tempestuous was the struggle to obtain permission for using puppets and for staging drama productions within the church. Both issues surfaced several times during the 1980s, but culminated at a brotherhood meeting in 1989. Arguing in favour of drama was Henry Neufeld who pointed towards the way an understanding of certain subjects could be enhanced by using such a medium. At the request of the AB and ministerial who thought that the brotherhood should hear the rationale that lay behind its previous decisions on the matter, Cornie Guenther agreed, albeit with considerable ambivalence, to represent the opposite viewpoint. He began by observing that some consider the use of drama to contravene the "biblical principle [of] reverence for the church sanctuary because it has been dedicated to the Lord." Further, he intimated that Neufeld's utilitarian argument was untenable because the actions by Christians should not be determined by using the unbiblical principle of the "end justifies the means." Finally, he suggested that permitting drama productions in the church "could be a stumbling block."[28] Both made ample use of the Bible to defend their position: the motion to permit the use of drama and puppets was defeated by a single vote. The matter was re-introduced at a brotherhood meeting two years later, and this time drama was approved—with the caveat that they be screened and approved by the ministerial—but the use of puppets remains forbidden.[29]

Significant also were the constantly changing judgements concerning who could use the church facility, and what customs would be permitted or forbidden at weddings. Initially, the church facility was only to be used for

weddings in instances where both individuals were members of OMC. In part, this policy was designed to encourage youth to become baptised members of the church prior to marriage.[30] However, it quickly became unworkable as young people from OMC met individuals from different church traditions (often at Bible school) who did not share the same preferences OMC leaders had retained from their OC past. As a result requests were soon heard from young couples who wanted to get married in OMC but who did not necessarily want to commit themselves to church membership.[31] In early 1982, a member whose partner belonged to a General Conference Mennonite church requested use of the church basement for a wedding reception. This request was denied. Three years later, this restrictive policy was revoked by the AB, despite the fact that the policy had been reviewed and re-affirmed at a brotherhood meeting only six months prior.[32] In 1989, a request from a member's daughter who had not herself become a church member to use the facility pushed the AB towards yet another modification. More recently, weddings have been conducted by OMC ministers in which the two partners were neither members nor had they had any close association with the church. Although not everyone agreed with the practice, it was justified as an "outreach" to specific families in the community. Similar arguments are being made in current discussions about whether OMC ministers should officiate at weddings involving individuals who have been divorced.

Accompanying the disputes defining who should be allowed to use the facility were disagreements over what customs would be permitted at weddings. The first weddings held at OMC signalled a decisive shift away from OC customs: the brides wore white dresses, processionals for the wedding party were permitted, programs to entertain guests were organized at receptions, and couples usually included one pair of attendants in their wedding party. A point of contention throughout its history has been the number of attendants that should be permitted to accompany the bride and groom. Requests for two, three and eventually four pair were at various points denied and then permitted. Other practices such as the use of candles, toasts to the bride, the role of photographers, and the tossing of bouquets and garters, sparked additional debates over what could be considered "proper" at a Christian wedding. OMC leaders repeatedly stressed that modern fashions and trends were not to be the standard for "Christian" weddings, but convincing the entire church community to adhere to one "standard" proved to be a difficult, and an elusive, pursuit.

(3) A third way in which the dualistic dynamic can be seen at work within OMC is in their understanding of Christian piety. OC Mennonites and many evangelical Protestants shared a preference for "practical," rather than dogmatic or philosophical, approaches to theology.[33] In common also was an assumption that religious commitments will have a direct effect on the behaviour of those within the community of faith. The piety of both groups was defined by fairly rigid codes of conduct that measured conformity and confirmed an acceptable degree of separateness from the world: for the OC

Mennonites this was understood in a more communal sense in that it verified their distinctiveness; for evangelical Protestants it defined the ethical behaviour, i.e., "holiness," expected of each individual. This resulted in substantial differences in what the two groups classified as acceptable and unacceptable practices. Although OMC leaders retained intact for some time their compunction about certain activities, many OC prohibitions (e.g., against wearing neckties, visiting other churches, and using musical instruments) were exchanged for the evangelical taboos against the "bar-room" vices of drinking, smoking, gambling and attendance at theatres.

The obsession with external conformity has had some ambivalent repercussions within OMC. First, it created a degree of theological confusion by obfuscating the differences between biblical and cultural issues: practices that were once denounced and prohibited as "unbiblical" would gradually (sometimes suddenly) become permissible.[34] If the Bible had not changed during the interim, what had? And if one, previously designated unbiblical, practice could be permitted, what else should remain forbidden? In addition to consuming administrative time and energy, the ongoing defense of inconsequential customs trivialized pronouncements on more important matters.

Second, more ironic has been the failure to recognize that emphasizing conformity to a specific code of personal conduct will not protect people from the more insidious manifestations of "worldliness" within Canadian culture (or, one might add, within North American evangelicalism). Most OMC members have avoided the demon of alcohol but they have not escaped the snares of middle-class materialism, or remained immune from the appeal of individualism and its emphasis on personal autonomy. The gradual acceptance by the younger generation of contemporary fashions, recreational pursuits, and modern forms of entertainment, as well as their refusal to give authority figures the same deference as had previous generations, led to the ongoing demand for the acceptance of still other practices. Church leaders were repeatedly drawn into a never-ending (and often rather arbitrary) process of redrawing the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable practices. The preoccupation with observable behaviour diverted attention away from analysing the more sinister impact of the values that mitigated against their more communitarian Anabaptist traditions and that were being uncritically absorbed in the process of acculturation.

Third, stressing compliance with external behaviour as the primary means of defining Christian "faithfulness," makes it unnecessary to nurture a sense of Christian vocation in which *all* Christians, and not just ministers and missionaries, are responsible for playing a part in permeating and influencing society. Although OMC does emphasize "outreach" and "witnessing" it has generally been perceived as one more isolated item on a list of required Christian activities, and not as a part of a larger more integrated vision of responsibility for transforming society.[35] Despite the preoccupation with personal conduct which legitimized a passivity towards involvement in all aspects of society, there are indications that things are changing as members of OMC become

increasingly interested in having their views represented on local issues. A significant step was taken in 1982 when OMC, along with the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Bergthaler Church, negotiated an agreement with the school board in Osler. The churches hired a teacher to teach Christian education to several grades in the local elementary school. Their success in inaugurating the program (and the popularity of the program itself) helped OMC leaders realize the degree of influence they could assert within the community. Gradually OMC became interested in extending its influence on other fronts. In 1989, opposition to the presence of a beer garden at a local sports day resulted in an agreement by the Osler parks and recreation board to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages at subsequent events. In 1993, OMC helped facilitate a petition against the Wagon Wheel Restaurant in the neighbouring community of Warman which had applied for a licence to sell alcoholic beverages. The AB sent a spokesperson representing the congregation to a hearing organized by the Liquor Licensing Commission.[36] During the early 1990s several younger members of the congregation began participating in local school board and municipal politics. The visible evangelical presence in the Reform Party prompted many at OMC to become members of the party prior to the 1993 federal election. For most, this was the first time that their involvement in the political process had extended beyond merely casting a ballot.[37]

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

The evangelical environment along with its missionary impulse made Bible schools the post-secondary educational option of choice.[38] During its twenty-year history, more than 80 individuals from OMC have attended such schools—this represents about 20% of all individuals who have been significantly involved with the church. Almost half of these students completed a three-year diploma program. These students have made a substantial contribution to the life of the congregation through their active support and loyal participation in church programs.

Several local transdenominational schools—Millar College of the Bible (formerly Millar Memorial Bible Institute) located in Pambrun, SK, and Nipawin Bible Institute located in Nipawin, SK, have consistently been the most popular choices.[39] These schools strengthened the kind of biblicism preferred by leaders at OMC as well as their preference for non-denominational "faith" missions over denominational efforts. More important is the way these schools reinforced suspicions of higher education that lingered in the minds of many at OMC as a vestige of their OC past (university and seminary education was routinely denigrated and discouraged at schools like Millar).[40] It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that only 1% have opted to attend a Bible college, and only 3% have completed some university training.[41] (This compares to 7% who have completed some training program at a technical institute.) Although the opportunity to attend Bible school represented an educational advance, the limited range of curricular options has done little to enhance job prospects for their students. Even those interested in full-time ministry have found this to be true as mission agencies have increasingly demanded a baccalaureate degree and/or seminary training as a minimum prerequisite. More serious is the predominant focus on a "practical" curriculum within these Bible schools which minimizes the importance of a scholarly study of the Bible and theology.[42] Although most students find the nurturing environment of these institutions helpful, the rather superficial knowledge of the Bible and developments within contemporary theology often makes it difficult for them to recognize and critique accurately the values and ideas shaping contemporary society.

Independence versus Denominationalism

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

During its first year of existence the OMC group convened monthly brotherhood meetings at which all decisions were made including mundane matters such as the purchase of construction materials, the planning of services, the dispersal of offerings, as well as the more consequential decisions concerning negotiations with the CMC. Unlike the OC system in which the bishop was given the final word, the OMC group tried to work towards a consensus. Only when this proved impossible would formal votes take place.

While Jake Wiebe was, with his status as a minister, the more visible spokesperson for the group at the outset, his job with a construction firm limited his time. It was the organizational experience and initiative of two brothers, Cornie Guenther and Peter Guenther, that contributed substantially to the actual formation of a new church. During the winter months, these two grain farmers applied the administrative experience gained while serving on the boards of community co-operatives to the new undertaking.

Early in 1975 plans were made to contact the leaders of the CMC in Manitoba about the possibility of joining their denomination.[43] A delegation visited Steinbach in March 1975. For the group at Osler, the immediate issue was the desire to obtain certification for Wiebe authorizing him to preside at weddings and funerals. However, underlying this concern was also the fact that joining another denomination would alleviate the necessity of completing what appeared to be a daunting project: applying for government registration and a tax exemption number required a more sophisticated organizational structure—including a formal constitution—than they had constructed at the time. Following a visit and a presentation in July 1975 by Bishop Schellenberg the group voted in favour of applying for entry into the denomination. Particularly appealing was the familiarity of many CMC customs (e.g., the use of a catechism, brotherhood meetings and three church offices), and the promise of assistance in organizing a church. CMC leaders explicitly precluded the possibility of financial assistance. They outlined a number of conditions for acceptance which was preceded by the unambiguous directive that the new group agree to "abide by the rules set down by the CMC Gemeinde and ministerial."[44] The CMC ministerial were not happy about certain changes already made by the OMC: prior to acceptance into the denomination they asked the group to reinstitute segregated seating and to insure that services were more bilingual rather than exclusively English. Although some members of OMC were disappointed by such an order they were too deferential to ministerial authority to criticize loudly.

In response to their decision to join the CMC, a new organizational structure was instituted in October 1975. Familiar to the group at Osler were the three church offices designated by the CMC: deacons, ministers and a bishop. Because the CMC refused to recognize previously-held offices, a ministerial election was conducted in October 1975. Jake Wiebe was re-elected as a minister and Cornie Guenther was chosen as deacon (three years later Guenther was elected as a minister). All individuals elected to church offices were expected to volunteer their time.[45] An administration committee (later renamed the OMC Board of Administration but commonly referred to as the AB) comprised of four elected laymen, all ministers and deacons was formed. Although the monthly brotherhood meetings held at the outset had reflected a new emphasis on the participation of the laity, and had resulted in a genuine democratization of power, the initiation of new programs and the ongoing growth of the new congregation made such a system of governance

cumbersome and time-consuming. While the AB's relationship to the brotherhood has never been clearly spelled out, it is theoretically accountable to the brotherhood. But as the AB assumed more responsibility, it became the centre of power. The number involved gradually increased as representatives from the different church programs were included. Without a clear mandate and with a somewhat ambiguous line of accountability, it has often operated in the arbitrary manner reminiscent of the style characterizing the OC ministerial. Brotherhood meetings became more infrequent, sometimes only once or twice per annum.

Several important administrative changes took place in 1983. To enhance its efficiency, the AB designated a chairperson. The first person in this position was Ken Guenther, a Bible college graduate who was participating in an internship program instituted by the church to help prospective missionary candidates obtain ministry experience.[46] From this point onwards the AB delegated minor decisions to other committees, and focused its attention on formulating policies and supervising programs. Important also was the formal separation of the AB and Missions Board which had been meeting jointly since 1976 when the Missions Board was first created to coordinate the dispersal of funds and to promote missions. This move reflected a partial de-centralization of power and once again permitted a greater degree of lay participation in the day-to-day decisions of the church. No longer as preoccupied with internal matters, the AB turned its attention, at least for a time, to encouraging outreach initiatives.[47]

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

The first debate on the issue was generated by a proposal in October 1987 to hire Mel and Liz [Wiebe] Sigglekow as youth pastors. Despite being well-qualified and experienced in youth work, the proposal was rejected. In part this was due to fierce opposition to Mel's "openness towards rock music," and a concern that Mel was not a Mennonite. But veiling these more visible concerns was the intuitive recognition that accepting the proposal would alter fundamentally the assumptions underlying the church's system of governance. Approving the proposal would not merely have been an endorsement of the Sigglekows, but it would have implicitly signalled the acceptance of the practice of hiring an outsider as a minister rather than electing an insider; it would have meant funding a new, young minister without consideration for the

significant personal and financial sacrifices made by the other two ministers; it would have meant treating a member of the ministerial as an "employee" with a job description, a supervisor and a negotiable length of term rather than as a neighbour in the community who had been given, and who had accepted, a life-long responsibility.

Initial reticence changed rather dramatically with the announcement to the AB by Jake Wiebe in October 1989 that he could no longer maintain a concurrent commitment to OMC and his employer without substantial changes to one or both areas of responsibility. At a subsequent brotherhood meeting Wiebe reiterated his concern. Despite some hesitation about the need for more careful reflection about the potential implications, many felt a sense of obligation to support Wiebe who had volunteered his time to OMC for many years. As a result, another motion was passed to provide Wiebe with a full-time salary. The AB delegated the delicate job of implementing this change to Pastoral Pay Committee chaired by deacon Jake Fehr. Subsequent meetings discussed matters like the creation of a job description, determining an appropriate length of term, Wiebe's lack of education, the financial impact on other church budget commitments, the possibility of creating resentment between the two ministers by a practice that could be perceived as partisan, the different expectations that the congregation would have by having one minister salaried, etc. Although Wiebe began drawing a salary from the church in 1990, the Pastoral Pay Committee continued to struggle to resolve both the questions raised by this transition and the growing tensions between the two ministers.

During the summer of 1993 the Pastoral Pay Committee finally presented a "Pastoral Staff Policy" to the brotherhood for scrutiny and approval. The change from a "self-supporting pastoral system" to "a need-oriented pastoral support system" proved to be a clever compromise between the former system of elected volunteers used by OMC and the system of "calling" (and funding) a minister used by many Protestant churches. The new policy continued to affirm the practice of electing one of its own members whenever it was deemed necessary or desirable to have another minister, but it recognized that henceforth all ministers would be entitled to financial remuneration. However, ministers would only receive funding if deemed eligible by the financial formula outlined in the policy.[48] This arrangement addressed a concern raised by some that Wiebe was receiving preferential treatment. Both ministers endorsed the policy even though it meant a small reduction in salary for Wiebe and the formula disqualified Guenther entirely on account of his farm income. Both ministers feared a system based entirely on performance which might leave them vulnerable to dismissal by a vote of confidence. In keeping with the traditional assumption that ministers are "for life," the policy carefully sidesteps the matter of prerequisite qualifications, lines of accountability and protocol to be used for evaluating the performance of ministers. In response to a question concerning the procedure to follow if a minister "does not meet

expectations," the Committee rather ambiguously suggested that any problems could be deferred to "the local ministerial or AB, and if it still can not be resolved then it would be presented to the conference executive."[49]

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

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

Although OMC leaders deliberately sought out the CMC, and recognize the value of being part of a conference, they have become increasingly interested in preserving their independence. In part OMC's autonomy within the CMC has been the natural consequence of its geographical distance from Manitoba, but it is also a response to certain practices and proposals by conference leaders. During the past two decades, a variety of small conflicts between CMC leaders and OMC have accrued to create a growing sense of alienation, and a defensiveness within OMC about retaining control over its own affairs. For example, during the late 1970s, discussions took place concerning several organizational changes within the CMC: in addition to formulating a statement of faith, the conference drafted a missions handbook containing the suggestion that all funds designated for missions in each congregation be forwarded to, and dispersed by, the conference Missions Board. This was vigorously resisted by OMC. Although relations have always been cordial, the level of financial support sent to the conference remains an ongoing point of contention, and as a result, the conference has made repeated attempts to convince OMC to increase it. During the 1980s CMC leaders made a more conscious attempt to emphasize Anabaptist distinctives like nonresistance. The fact that the doctrine of nonresistance was not emphasised during their particular OC experience, and the influence of evangelical voices that categorize such distinctives as "non-essentials," prompted OMC leaders to reject recommendations by CMC leaders that OMC become more Anabaptist. OMC leaders ardently reject by pejoratively designating as "liberal" Anabaptist peace motifs even though

they are unfamiliar with the work of Anabaptist theologians. This aversion is reflected in OMC's relationship to Steinbach Bible College which is run by a consortium of Mennonite groups including the CMC. The school has repeatedly been denied permission to do student recruitment at OMC and OMC students have yet to attend the college.

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

Conclusion

Few deny the significant (but varying) influence that evangelical Protestantism has had on Mennonites in Canada. Some decry the "awful and terrible destruction" it presumably caused, or see it as an alien force that disrupted and confused the religious life of Mennonite individuals and communities;[50] others hail it as the culturally neutral essence of biblical Christianity that liberated Mennonites from the spiritual sterility of Mennonite traditions and the artificial boundaries created by ethnicity. While these polarities still persist, neither adequately explains the story of OMC.

Contrary to those who characterize the influence of evangelicalism on Mennonites in exclusively negative terms, the people at OMC unanimously see their transition away from the OC as positive. As "the world" encroached into areas over which the OC had once been able to maintain exclusive control its objective of isolation became impossible to maintain. In its reaction to forces it could neither understand nor withstand the OC strategy gradually became irrelevant and even oppressive. The North American expression of

evangelicalism became a desirable religious option because it offered what was perceived as both a spiritual and cultural emancipation. It provided an alternate religious (and cultural) system that was better able to interpret the modern world to a group of traditional, religiously-minded Mennonites. In part, it was able to do so because of its affinity with certain priorities held by this group of OC Mennonites. Evangelicalism served as an important conduit towards acculturation into contemporary Canadian culture by helping OMC keep certain religious priorities intact.

While members of OMC may be partially correct in interpreting their story as a spiritual awakening, a closer look reveals an intricate combination of concurrent theological, sociological, psychological and cultural forces at work. The failure to recognize that human motivations and behaviours (including the construction of religious institutions) are always a complex combination of the "sacred" and "profane," and the inability to account for these forces left OMC vulnerable to some rather unexpected consequences. The failure to see that its preference for evangelicalism represented a critique of OC traditions and the adoption of an alternative "ideological community" and culture which could better facilitate an upward social mobility has left it unable (perhaps also unwilling) to look critically at the individualistic (and consumeristic) values absorbed in the process, and to recognize the extent to which OC values and practices continue to shape their lives.

Notes

[1] This is a revised version of a paper presented to the Canadian Society of Church History, University of Calgary, June 1994. I am grateful to the leaders of Osler Mission Chapel for providing information and the readers of this article for their many helpful suggestions.

[2] Precise membership and attendance statistics for the OC Mennonite Church are difficult to obtain. In 1977, the first year in which OC Mennonites are included in the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, the Saskatchewan division is listed as having 1087 members. However, the number who regularly attended one of the four OC churches in Saskatchewan during the 1970s and 1980s was significantly lower than this number. The 1990 edition of the *Mennonite World Handbook* is more accurate: it lists 415 baptized members estimating that approximately 50% of these attended services.

[3] By "evangelical" I refer broadly to Protestant groups that fit inside the widely accepted, elastic, descriptive, creedal quadrilateral first outlined by British historian David Bebbington (*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: From the 1730s to the 1980s* [London: Unwin Hyman, 1989], 1-19) and widely accepted by American and Canadian historians.

[4] A thorough study of the historical relationships between evangelicalism and the Mennonites within the North American context remains a significant lacuna. Helpful articles include Perry Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again: Mennonites, New Evangelicals, and the Search for a Useable Past,

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

[5] For a discussion of stratification, class structure and distribution of power among OC Mennonites see Calvin W. Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 93-102.

[6] Because Canadian law required land to be titled in the names of individuals, the village system required a high degree of co-operation. The lack of co-operation by even a small minority easily threatened the entire system by withdrawing a portion of the land base in the shared open-field system. Many found the narrow fields unsuitable for the technological advancements in agriculture which was rapidly becoming more machine-based. Those who homesteaded outside of the original boundaries of the reserve were required to live, and make improvements, on their particular piece of land: therefore they could not participate in the communal sharing of land. The migrations away from Saskatchewan between 1920 and 1940 further fragmented the village settlements (see Richard Friesen, "Saskatchewan Mennonite Settlements: The Modification of Old World Settlement Patterns," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 9, no. 2 [1977]: 72-90).

[7] Prior to the emergence of Martensville, a large group of OC families asked that an OC church be located within Saskatoon. This proposal was adamantly rejected (Herbert Peters, "Martensville: Halfway House to Urbanization," *Mennonite Life* 23 [October 1968]: 165).

[8] There has always been a steady trickle of individual dissenters leaving the OC church: they usually joined Mennonite groups like the Conference of Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren and especially the Rudnerweider.

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

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

[11]Other incongruities in the OC religious experience that often prompted a search for more meaningful religious alternatives included: the lack of a consistent morality despite a high level of religious activity; the lack of spiritual vitality despite a significant degree of isolation; and the cultural accomodations permitted to enhance economic growth while adhering to the myth that a

static body of beliefs and standards are being preserved.

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

[13] See Theron Schlabach's discussion of the humility motif among Mennonites in *Peace, Faith, Nation* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1988), 29-32.

[14] In 1975 Jacob H. Pauls, a former minister in the Osler General Conference Church, donated several acres of land in Osler on which the group built a new church. Even the architecture reflected a departure from the plain OC churches: the OMC facility included a basement with modern kitchen facilities and washrooms, carpeted floors, oak pews and communion table, and a biblical motto etched on the front wall.

[15] An organizational meeting held a week prior on 11 November 1974 included women but on account of some complaints the new group reverted back to the OC practice of brotherhood meetings.

[16] See Mark Noll and Nathan Hale, eds., *The Bible in America* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982).

[17] Minutes of OMC Brotherhood [MOMCB], 3 September 1981.

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

[19] The incentive for missions at OMC was never as closely linked to an urgent premillennial eschatology as in some corners of evangelicalism (see Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1925* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979], 67; and Dana L. Roberts, "'The Crisis of Missions': Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions," in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 29-46). Despite the fact that the CMC Statement of Faith is neither explicitly premillennial nor does it mention inerrancy, both doctrines are important to members of OMC.

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

[21] MOMCB, 28 July 1978.

[22] Redekop, *Old Colony Mennonites*, 228.

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

[24] The ambivalence towards culture among evangelicals is a major theme within George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980).

[25] In *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangeliclaism* George

Marsden discusses the dilemmas created by a tradition of separatism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 6-7. See also Richard Quebedeaux's book about evangelicals emerging from an "anticultural ghetto" (*The Worldly Evangelicals* [New York: Harper & Row, 1978]), and Bruce Shelley's discussion of the "cultural isolationism" of North American evangelism in *Evangelicalism in America* (Grand Rapids: Eeermans, 1967), 112.

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

[27] See e.g., a request by the Ben Goertzen family which was denied on account of "the group's various instruments and amplifiers" (Minutes of OMC Administration Board/Missions Board [MOMCAB/MB], 1 February 1978).

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

[29] MOMCB, 12 November 1991. A related question was discussed concerning whether it is "permissable to use a live baby to portray the baby Jesus in a drama." The AB ruled that this "would be acceptable but to use caution when an older person portrays Christ, such as the person be a believer, and the words used would be words that Jesus used recorded in the Scriptures."

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

[31] In 1980, a woman's membership was abruptly terminated on account of marrying a non-member (MOMCAB, 6 March 1980).

[32] MOMCAB, 5 February 1985; see also MOMCB, 26 June 1984. The reversal of policy highlights both the ambiguity of jurisdiction and accountability of the ministerial and AB to the brotherhood, and the manner in which the pressure for change tended to become more acute when children of the ministerial were involved.

[33] This is true despite the fact that evangelicals have placed greater importance on the necessity of doctrinal creeds than do most Mennonite traditions. The emphasis on creeds among evangelicals is dissipated somewhat by their pragmatic preoccupation with communicating the "gospel."

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

[35] OMC has participated in various "outreach" endeavours: in addition to participating in local evangelistic crusades (see e.g., Minutes of the Osler Mission Chapel and Bergthaler Ministerial Meeting, 22 November 1988), it has organized an annual Daily Vacation Bible School program for local children. The Missions Board has sponsored 5-day clubs for children in remote rural communities, and an annual "Christmas parcel outreach" (MOMCMB, 26 November 1987). In 1988 plans were made to participate in the "Why Encounter" program which aimed to place a book by this title in every home in Osler. Participation came to an abrupt end when they discovered a two-page article featuring the work of Mother Theresa. Outreach programs organized by OMC tend to

be event-oriented and generally only a minority of members are involved.

[36] The vigorous participation by OMC people at this hearing is somewhat incongruous with the fact that few, if any, have any inhibitions about frequenting licensed establishments elsewhere.

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

[38] Bible schools or institutes typically offer a Bible-centred, intensely practical, lay-oriented program of post-secondary theological training that is at, or slightly above, a high school level. They are different from Bible colleges which are degree-conferring and whose curricula include more liberal arts or general education courses (Bruce L. Guenther, "The Origin of the Bible School Movement in Western Canada: An Ethnic Interpretation, *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* [1993]: 135).

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

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

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

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

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

[44] MOMCB, 2 October 1975.

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

[46] MOMCAB, 2 December 1983. CMC leaders in Manitoba repeatedly expressed their disapproval of both the internship program, as well as the practise of having a non-ordained person chairing the AB.

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

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

[49] MOMCB, 14 June 1993.

[50] See comments made by James Urry in David Arnasson, "A History of Turnstone Press," in *Acts of Concealment: Mennonites Writing in Canada* (Waterloo: Univ. of Waterloo Press, 1992), 214; and Ted Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1996).