

# Still in the Image? The Anabaptist-Mennonite Imagination of the Family<sup>1</sup>

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In 1980 Winnipeg's Turnstone Press published a hundred-page prose poem by Patrick Friesen, *The Shunning*,<sup>2</sup> a ground-breaking work of Canadian Mennonite literature, which addressed one of its oldest and most troubling themes, and showed its wrenching effect in a contemporary, albeit conservative setting.<sup>3</sup> The long poem, later rewritten and performed as a stage play, tells of the implementation of "the ban" in a semi-closed community, when a member has "departed from the doctrine" of the church. The victim, a silent family man named Peter, does not easily wear the authority assigned to him by his position. When he fails also to be a pillar of doctrinal purity — he has trouble with the concept of Hell — he is "put in the ban." His wife, Helena, is instructed to stay away from his bed and she obeys. Friesen documents the harm done by this separation and the shunning by the community. Eventually Peter's wife, too, "lets him go." (*Shunning*, 40) The "cold, cold light" of righteousness defeats the marriage bond. Helena says:

Before Peter's death, in the months I slept alone, I was held in esteem. The leaders, like Loewen, praised me for my faith. In church I had the sympathy and respect of my brothers and sisters. I was being true to Christ. Some marveled at my courage in living with a sinful man who had placed himself

outside the church. They thought I feared and even despised Peter, but that I stayed in his house to give him a reason to come back to the Lord. I never feared him, though sometimes I feared for him. I loved him. (*Shunning*, 51)

Peter eventually commits suicide, and the extended family carries the burden of his problematic death from generation to generation. Years later the late Peter's brother's second wife muses:

You say you've read about Simons. Now what do you know about him? Do you remember J. J. Fast? No, of course not. You were only a boy when he died. But if you had known him you would know something about Simons. That kind of man. Always serious. Even the few jokes he cracked weighed a ton. What mattered most to him *more than his family I think* was that the church should always be right that no one should put himself above the church. (*Shunning*, 90) [Italics mine]

This paper suggests that a certain image of the family, in its structure and its relationship to the *Gemeinde*, has been preserved through almost five centuries, in spite of great changes in both institutions, church and family, and indeed, that these have had an ongoing symbiotic relationship of sorts, each shedding light on our understanding of the other.

From the outset the Anabaptist-Mennonite *Gemeinde* (congregation) has understood itself in terms of the imagery of the family.<sup>4</sup> Like many other guiding motifs this one is taken directly from the Bible, Jesus having come to tell mankind about "the Father," and founding a community of brothers and sisters in the faith. The reformers, including the Anabaptists, deconstructed the medieval, Roman Catholic family image to the extent of removing the "Mother of God," a loss lamented in Julia Kasdorf's poem, "Catholics,"<sup>5</sup> and viewed generally as a theological subtraction which has arguably had some measurable effects on the social as well as the theological aftermath of the Reformation for our, as well as for other denominations. The weighty masculine symbolism of the pairing of "Father" and "Son" has likewise left its mark.

The family image is strongly implicit in the "new birth" and/or the "adoption" of a child of God, becoming an "heir" to the Christian estate. And, of course, there are other powerful images in Scripture, that of the church as the bride of Christ, and of the wedding feast. Interestingly, this image, which appealed especially to a Pietist sensibility, has been taken up by contemporary Mennonite writers in a way that gives a new, corporeal meaning to songs like: "Jesus, lover of my Soul, let me to they bosom fly."<sup>6</sup>

This paper argues that a characteristic, Anabaptist-Mennonite image of the family has emerged over time and maintained itself with some tenacity even in times of great change. This image shows both the weaknesses and strengths of an ethno-religious group, beholden to what one might call its own mythology.

But, first of all, what is the ‘imagination’ in this connection? Although it was usually ignored or taken for granted as implicit in earlier Anabaptist-Mennonite scholarship, the term ‘imagination’ has come into its own in the past several decades, especially in theology. I maintain the old notion that our imaginations “body forth” much of what we think; that we think in “pictures” or images much of the time. The German language has a good word, *Denkbilder*, to describe this manner of understanding, which informs us, not only through the senses, but also in our conceptual thinking. Of course, the Bible as we know contains much imaginative narrative, and Jesus’ teaching constantly appeals to the imagination — in order that we might understand!

That is why Jesus told the story of the “Prodigal Son”: in order to *show* us “the Father.” I vividly recall a sermon preached by John Neufeld, former President of Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, exploring this manner of revelation of God *the father* in the narrative of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> And throughout the Gospels, Jesus’ similes and parables evoke the images which make our comprehension of the “Upside-down Kingdom” possible. Not many syllogisms there. It is Paul, the biblical writer, who fills his letters with words like “therefore”.

Seeing themselves as the family or household of God, our earliest brothers and sisters could access the other images that describe the church — there are 96 such images in the New Testament, according to Jack Suderman of Mennonite Church Canada Resources.<sup>8</sup> The Anabaptists could see themselves as part of an organism, dependent on one another in a life relationship, the body of Christ. Indeed, one would think that such powerful spiritual imagery would equip the brother- and sisterhood to uphold strong “family values,” whatever that might mean in the circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

It can come as a shock therefore to read in the writings of Menno Simons and in the Anabaptist songs a theological message that looks different from what one might expect. The songs reflect great love among both natural and spiritual siblings, but always insist that it is sometimes necessary to lose one’s wife or husband and children, one’s family, if required by the higher claims of the heavenly kingdom. In the case of a martyrdom that was usually the condition. And Menno, especially in his tracts dealing with the ban and shunning, does not hesitate to separate in the name of God those whom God presumably had joined together.<sup>10</sup> Menno is of course looking at cases in which a “believer” is married to an “unbeliever.” How these situations came about and their attending circumstances do not appear to enter into his consideration, and one might think, from our perspective, that such factors, that is, the conversion of one parent, should play a part in how such matters are dealt with. But, as we see in the Anabaptist songs as well, such judgments are not so much simply *harsh* as they are *absolute*. There is a starkness to their spiritual self-understanding which is informed by biblical images of light and darkness, images that are “black and white.”<sup>11</sup> One is “in the [spiritual] family” or one is not. As we see in the martyr songs, the faith proposition is all or nothing, and in that setting the family must be relegated to relative secondary importance. There is a passage in Menno’s tract “The True Christian Faith” which speaks of the

relationship of divine and “natural” love, a passage which one might say puts the family in its place in the scheme of things:

That love is of such an effective power and nature may be seen in natural love. We do not have to admonish reasonable parents to provide their children with necessary food and clothing, for natural love will admonish them to these things. Similarly, a husband and wife who sincerely love each other count it no hardship willingly to serve each other and do things together as is proper, they being one flesh. So is also the nature and property of divine love. For all those who by faith are one with the Father and with his Son Christ Jesus in love and spirit, through the true and genuine knowledge of the afore-mentioned favor, these do not have to be admonished to serve the Lord, to seek the Kingdom of God, to use baptism and the Lord’s Supper according to the ordinance of Scripture, to exercise control over heart and tongue, to ponder the law and will of God with all earnestness, to obey Christ and follow him; and not to love gold and silver, money and possessions, *wife and children*, life and death, above Christ and His Word.<sup>12</sup>

There is an example of this drastic sense of proportion in the 23<sup>rd</sup> song of the *Ausbund*<sup>13</sup>, about a certain Thomas Drucker of Cologne, who died in 1557. A letter from Drucker’s wife to him in prison is cited, reminding him to remain steadfast in faith, and his reply tells of his peace and acceptance of what will befall him. He instructs his wife to bring up the children in the fear of the Lord, and continues:

Nach Weib und Kind, die sichtbar seyn, Will ich jetzund nicht trachten,  
 Noch sinds mir lieb im Herzen mein, Vor Dreck will ich sie achten.  
 Viel höher kenn ich meinen Gott, Mit ihm sein Schmach zu tragen,  
 Das Egyptisch Gut der Welt vergaht, Das soll mir nicht behagen.

[To my wife and child, the visible, I will not turn my thought,  
 Though still dear to my heart, I will consider them as dirt;  
 Much higher do I know my God, to bear his shame with him.  
 The Egyptian goods of this world are fleeting; they will not please me.]

It is typical of these texts to be replete with paradox, taking over and building upon the paradox of Scripture. One cannot doubt the love of the family members for each other, and yet the sacrifice seems rather willingly (or easily?) given. One is reminded of the Mary Beckom song, where sisters-in-law join together, almost casually, according to the text. Mary Beckom is arrested at her bedside, but manages to speak with her brother’s wife:

Zu ihres Bruders Fraue  
 Sprach die Jungfrau mit Sitt,

Viel guts ich dir vertraue,  
Magst du auch ziehen mit,  
Und mir Gesellschaft halten.<sup>14</sup>

[To her brother's wife the young woman spoke politely,  
If you go with me and keep me company, we can speak in confidence.]

Maria's brother is consulted and gives his permission:

Ursel ihr's Bruders Weibe  
Hatt ihres Gemahls Gunst,  
Ob sie schon war sein Leibe...

[Ursel, her brother's wife, had the goodwill of her husband  
(And received permission) although she was "his flesh." ]

We would say that they were a close family. In keeping with the paradoxical language of much of the songs, one finds expressions like:

Heut wird mein Eh gebrochen;  
Ein's Manns Weib bin ich g'weßt,  
Jetzt hab ich mich versprochen  
Christo, der mich erlößt.<sup>15</sup>

[Today my marriage vow is broken;  
I have been a man's wife,  
Now I have promised myself  
To Christ, who saves me.]

In other songs of the *Ausbund* there are moving exchanges between husband and wife and children, but everywhere the cause of Christ is put before all other considerations. This is not to say that there were not capitulations to such powerful temptations, and indeed there were those who recanted their faith, or its Anabaptist particulars, in order to save themselves and their families. These did not become martyrs and their stories are mostly not recorded, a telling lacuna in our history.

Without more detailed analysis it is fair, I think, to generalize that the early Anabaptist position on the family, in the face of a harsh surrounding reality, was rather clear; the Kingdom of God and its justice came first. The familial attachments were good in themselves and part of Christ's teaching, but they could not make absolute claims. In opting for the crown of martyrdom they accepted the cross of suffering, *which included the renunciation of their loved ones*.

One of the seemingly paradoxical consequences which has been observed in the literature is the seriousness attached to the training of children, who are not simply abandoned to the grace or judgment of God.<sup>16</sup> This may be seen most easily

as following from the doctrine of adult baptism, since innocent children would grow into accountability and have to be prepared for a conscious decision to join the church. In any case, subsequent Mennonite history documents a family unit that is authoritarian and patriarchal and takes for granted a strong disciplinary structure. They have taken seriously the warnings of leaders like Menno and Peter Walpot, who used metaphoric language to describe the need for family discipline. Walpot said: "It is most dangerous for a child to have a knife in its hands, or a madman a sword."<sup>17</sup> since a child, before it comes to accountability, is not only impressionable but unpredictable as well. And on the latter point Erasmus is quoted as saying: "An earthen pot will keep long the savor of the liquor that it is first seasoned with, and it will be long ere it go out."<sup>18</sup> Discipline and obedience were thus the mainstays of family order in the earlier phases of our history. Menno enjoins a parent to "be as sharp, pungent salt, a shining light, and an unblamable, faithful teacher, each in his own home."<sup>19</sup>

By the time the period of extreme persecution had passed, the Mennonite family had been forged into a strong, perhaps rigid patriarchal unit with strict order and discipline. This was in keeping with the Anabaptist image of the church as a family within the holy nation of God. The head of the family represented Christ, the head of the church. This structure was, as it turns out, a good preparation for the kind of agricultural life which the Mennonite family would adopt for the next several centuries. Obedience and discipline were necessary for a successful family farming operation before the industrial revolution. The remarkable success of the Mennonites on the Ukrainian steppe is due in no small part to the order and cohesiveness of the family unit, which amounted to an efficient and energetic economic engine. One need only read the narrative description of village life in Arnold Dyck's novel, *Lost in the Steppe*, to realize what had come into being over time and would remain a vital part of the Russian Mennonite legacy. In hindsight, and with all its faults, it may be called the *functional family* par excellence.<sup>20</sup>

For over a hundred years the family was at the center of what became the Russian Mennonite "Commonwealth," an island of relative prosperity and order within the wide steppe landscape of the Ukraine — in many ways a "model" society as it had been intended. But artistic images of that "model" society were not created until that society had been destroyed. These images took many forms: they appeared in romantic or naive visual art, in novels and poems, in family arts like cooking, and so on. Some of these arts, perhaps most, have been attempts to preserve something of that pattern of life, but others have given the artistic imagination scope for critique as well, for a laying bare a way of life that was not without spot or wrinkle.

One of the first serious Mennonite poets, Gerhard Friesen (1894-1983), who wrote his poems under the pseudonym of Fritz Senn, has captured much of the ethos of the Russian Mennonite family in his lyrical poems.<sup>21</sup> Some, like "Mein Vater," present the austere and silent father, who is at times confused with God by the obedient son.<sup>22</sup> At other times, as in "Roggenbrot," the father presides over the family meal with warmth, if not with words. Friesen does not idealize the Russian

Mennonite family, but he does show its members fulfilling symbolic functions, which are in accord with the authoritarian structure of the church at that time. Mothers and daughters are at best taken for granted, both in the family and the *Gemeinde*.

In his most important poem, a cycle called "Behind the Plow" (*Hinterm Pflug - Stimmungen*), Gerhard Friesen evokes the atmosphere of the Russian Mennonite village in a variety of moods, but not without a perceptive examination and critique of family and social life in that supposedly idyllic setting. His plowman, like Charles G.D. Roberts' sower<sup>23</sup> is "unwittingly divine," at once representing God to his family and then of course dominating that family in ways not always divine at all. Other writers and poets of that Russian Mennonite generation present a similar picture, the notable exception being the novel *Agatchen. A Russian Mennonite Mother's Story* by Peter G. Epp.<sup>24</sup>

In moving from writers like Arnold Dyck and Gerhard Friesen, who experienced that life in Russia as children, to contemporary writers and poets, one may be surprised to find that biblical and agricultural imagery very much intact, though seen from a new perspective. Consider the family depicted in the first poem of Sarah Klassen's collection, *Journey to Yalta*<sup>25</sup>:

Small deaths  
 Too often my Grandmother buried  
 her babies. Their spirits slipped from her  
 hands like startled birds  
 or wayward angels no one can persuade  
 to stay.

Before she could call out  
 or close her thin fingers, their eyes  
 fell shut. Someone placed them in lace-  
 lined boxes, pinned pink roses  
 to the folds of their white sleeves.

Two survived. My mother  
 and her younger brother left  
 unfinished quarrels long enough  
 to consider the stilled lashes  
 the small white feet  
 pointing forever to the sky.

Grandmother, grieving  
 searched all conceivable corners  
 of her soul  
 for evidence of unexamined sin.

Grandfather  
 who always called the doctor  
 too late, sits upright beside the small coffin  
 hands splayed on his knees. Mouth tight.  
 His eyes bright nails that hold together  
 life and death.

Year after year  
 he stares straight past me  
 facing unafraid  
 the omniscient eye of God who is merciful.  
 Who is just.

We notice how the grandmother and mother deal with the everyday business of death, the “small deaths”, while the grandfather presides, becoming a kind of Mennonite icon on the living room wall.<sup>26</sup> Like this poem, Sarah Klassen’s poem “Married life” arranges stereotypical family images into a posed photograph:

Married life  
 Great grandfather was seven years  
 between wives. A wise God-fearing man they say  
 who walked upright beside the plough  
 leaving a straight furrow. Winters he milled wheat  
  
 waiting uncomplaining for rains in spring  
 for his sons to sow wild oats  
 before taking women to wed.  
 His oldest daughter died in childbirth.

Great grandfather’s hair and beard turned white  
 with flour dust and age, his face weathered  
 from winds moaning across the steppes.  
 In the slow ripening of years

he may have grown lonely like Adam  
 although he walked with God. He may have remembered  
 Isaac gnashing his teeth in anger  
 when the lovely morning sun flooded the tent.

In the fulness of time God stepped in.  
 Her name was Maria just like the first.  
 She was young and strong and didn’t mind his hair  
 whiter than her father’s.



She walked quietly beside him, bore him  
eight more sons. Millers and strong farmers  
they surround the old man  
sitting in honour beside her coffin.<sup>27</sup>

What we see is not a joyful domestic scene, but rather a somewhat stiff and even grim image common in early Mennonite portrait photography. We notice incidentally that the problem of family loss of a parent (through death) is addressed by adding new members -- we might say, several broken family units coming together, certainly for economic reasons, but also in keeping with an image of completeness, of wholeness.

These two poems have been cited as demonstrations of the centrality of the family in the perception of Mennonite writers of poetry and fiction, from the earliest texts of the Anabaptist song writers to the poets and novelists of today. The perspectives have certainly shifted, but the image endures, whether in praise or blame.

There is another kind of concrete writing, apart from poetry and fiction, which invites imaginative apperception. Mennonite history has in the main been written by men, who were committed to the facts as they understood them and their analysis. A recent example of a different way of writing history came to my attention in a most unexpected way. In 1981 a history of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia between 1925 and 1980 was published. It was authored by Heinrich and Gerhard Woelk, father and son, both leading participants in that eventful story. In translating that book I was struck by a remarkable change in the text at the point where the men had been removed from their families and so could no longer tell the story themselves. At that point, and only there, the narrative is carried forward by Helene Woelk, wife of Heinrich.

At once the talk is no longer so much about the organized church life within the political context as about Mennonites *as families* suffering dispersal and deportation. The church as a family became the family as church, with mothers telling Bible stories and singing their repertoire of songs to their children — and indeed to the few old and infirm men who accompanied them. Here is one paragraph from Helene Woelk's narrative, telling how she and her children, along with her old father, have been loaded into a boxcar bound for Kazakhstan, a month's journey away. She writes:

Pitch black night! The front very near. The doors were closed and the train silently started on its way. Where was it going? For the first night we cowered on our belongings. When day came, every family found its own things. There were some forty persons in our car. When the train stopped at a station, the few men and boys looked for some boards and soon two levels were constructed in the car and some order established. Thus each family received its humble place. The train stopped very seldom. When it did, Heinz and I ran to find hot water. We took sugar and bread with us and

that was our food for thirty-one days. Our situation deteriorated very quickly because the lice descended on us and how could we defend ourselves against them? There were only two small, high windows and only those close by had a chance of doing battle with the lice. The others had none and the problem became very great. This made me anxious about my two-month old boy. It was hard to watch him being tortured by these pests and to be quite helpless! Once the train stood still long enough for me to wash all his things. But we were never told how long the train would stand and thus could not know whether we could undertake any such projects. During those thirty-one days I lay down very little. The nights seemed endless. How happy I was that I had taken along a package of Christmas candles. By this light I found comfort in God's Word. Then I went to my "big" children and kissed them goodnight, for they needed comfort too. No evening passed when I did not remind them: "Pray for our father!" We could not imagine what awaited us.<sup>28</sup>

Even this brief example shows how concrete is the language from the perspective of a mother, who understands (or fails to) what is happening *in terms of* her family. The few men try to establish "order" even in the overcrowded boxcar, but the women are the ones who truly keep the families, and faith and hope, together. The writings of male historians, I would venture, are in the main more abstract, more analytical and more concerned with facts and figures, with points of doctrine and controversy, while the women deal in bread and pain and acts of love.

It is small wonder then that some of the most perceptive poetry on the Russian Mennonites is by Mennonite women, and not by participants but contemporaries who have had to imagine that lost world. And here too the father-dominated family is at the center, even in its dissolution, as for example in Di Brandt's text on her father's "abdication:"

ruling his shrunken kingdom from a wheelchair  
 my father peels potatoes in his withered  
 women's lap his forty years dominion over  
 every living thing comes only to this playing  
 cook's helper in my mother's kitchen his  
 mighty furrowed thousand acres contracted so  
 suddenly to her modest garden plot we are  
 made breathless by this hasty engagement  
 the shocking imprudence of a sick man's match  
 it isn't so far from what he would have wished  
 sitting in the sun on his mother's ancient  
 weathered wooden bench thinking old men's  
 thoughts & yet he holds through this indecent  
 bedding down to the lawful words of his old  
 command & she continues to obey while under

our desperate family charade his thick fingers  
 funblyngly caress these earth brown globes  
 learning gropingly to say the silent love words  
 of his abdicating<sup>29</sup>

Here are the old clichés, the thousand furrowed acres and the “old command,” even the charade of obedience, but also the grace of a fumbling caress accompanying the “silent words” of abdication. The reality has changed but it is seen *sub specia* the master image or narrative.

Patrick Friesen in his “Pa poems,” enters into a series of reflections on his dead father:

like jesus’ death  
 pa’s death split everything into before and after  
 and nothing was healed (Pa poem 3)<sup>30</sup>

For Di Brandt and Patrick Friesen the father imagery is still essentially biblical. For Elmer Suderman,<sup>31</sup> Audrey Poetker,<sup>32</sup> and others with a Russian Mennonite background the confluence of biblical and actual agricultural imagery remains dominant and becomes, especially in the poems of Sarah Klassen, iconic in its mysterious power. Pictures from that period are family pictures.

Has Patrick Friesen’s *Shunning* once again taken us back to our beginnings? Surely this depiction of some obscure conservative Mennonite group, reflecting in a disturbing way the intolerance of the early Anabaptist position on *Gemeinde* and family, has little relevance for the majority of Mennonites living in the contemporary Western world. Or might one suggest that the contemporary acceptance of divorce, within as well as outside the *Gemeinde*, with its consequences, can be seen as a kind of self-imposed, secularized ban, legitimizing the reduction of the traditional Mennonite family to its parts.

In an earlier paper about the image of the father in Mennonite poetry I referred to the virtually audible tearing of the social fabric, as poets like Di Brandt, Patrick Friesen, and Audrey Poetker spoke out from a new position in the Mennonite firmament, seeing fathers as men, for one thing, and not as lesser gods, and giving us a new perception of the family as a whole.<sup>33</sup> But even as they strike out against the “old order” and its tyranny, one senses the power of the family connection, its glue being so strong as to make separation painful in the extreme. Even in a dissenting generation the mnemonic imagination is informed by a traditional and thus biblical image of the family.

We still understand the Mennonite family in terms of *Gemeinde*, just as we envision the church in terms of the family. Of course this is with reference to a different image of the church than that held by our Anabaptist foremothers and forefathers. Both our churches and our families are less hierarchical and less structured. Fathers and mothers are torn between a variety of roles, and our children must be wondering at times what role we as parents are playing. They too have a

new context in which to develop. But behind these issues — and sometimes in tragic or starkly ironic contrast with the contemporary reality — lies the largely intact, and still available image of the family as a whole, first of all, a group of people who are in a primary relationship of interdependence on one another. In this essential respect the family remembers the Anabaptist *Gemeinde*, the brotherhood and sisterhood, which is seeking to realize the abundant life of the Kingdom.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was read at the “Mennonites and the Family” conference at Goshen College in October, 1999. My thanks to Sarah Klassen for permission to quote two of her poems in their entirety.

<sup>2</sup> Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> William Klassen refers to a recent grotesque application of this practice as reported in the *Globe and Mail*, of a widow who decided to “treat her son as if he didn’t exist” when he told her that he was gay. As Klassen puts it: “One Easter Sunday as an Easter gift he returned home, put an end to his life, and now really does not exist.” See: William Klassen, “Pilgram Marpeck and the Use of Power,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 17 (Winter, 1999), 42.

<sup>4</sup> This is reflected in Article 19 of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1995): “We believe that God intends human life to begin in families and to be blessed through families. Even more, God desires all people to become part of the church, God’s family. As single and married members of the church family give and receive nurture and healing, Christian family relationships can grow toward the wholeness that God intends.” (72)

<sup>5</sup> “At recess I turned the rope

While Michelle skipped and spun and counted to ten,

and a scapular leapt from the neck of her dress.

She dangled that pale pink ribbon,

a picture of the Blessed Mother on one end

and the Sacred Heart on the other.

saying, “This is my protection, front and back.” (*Sleeping Preacher*, 32)

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: “by the river” (85) in Audrey Poetker, *Standing all the night through* (Winnipeg, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Published in John H. Neufeld, “A Father and Two Sons,” in *The Story That Shapes Us. Sermons by John H. Neufeld* (Winnipeg: CMBC, 1997), 80-86.

<sup>8</sup> “‘96 images of the church’ A Worksheet for Congregations,” Winnipeg: Conference of Mennonites in Canada, n.d.

<sup>9</sup> In his “Final Instruction on Marital Avoidance” of 1558 Menno Simons asks his reader to “ponder with what a careful, fatherly, sympathetic, and prudent mind and spirit our teachers, the holy apostles of God and of Christ, have taught, admonished us... children, how they set us an example. How lovingly they have pointed us to the spirit, the nature, and the example of Christ, yes, have conducted themselves over against us as fathers and nursing mothers. See : Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans., Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1956), 1062.

<sup>10</sup> Menno Simon's position on this matter changed as he heard of severe impositions of the ban and shunning. Cf. "Instruction on Discipline to the Church at Emden": "...touching the relation of husband and wife in regard to the ban.... I have been distressed with great fear concerning this matter to this very hour, and cannot bring myself to agree with the extremism which is in evidence in the Netherlands just now. ... We were to admonish according to the known rule, forcing no one beyond that which his conscience could bear: in all love to bear and to tolerate." See: *Complete Writings*, 1050.

<sup>11</sup> See the foreword (*lorred*) at the beginning of the *Ausbund*: "Aber wie dem allem / wan es nit nacht und dunkel wuerd / wer wolt wissen was tag wer?" [Nevertheless/were it not for night and darkness./ who would know what the day is?]

<sup>12</sup> *Complete Writings*, 338. Italics mine. The same idea occurs in Luther's well known hymn text, "A Mighty Fortress is our God": "Let goods and kindred go. This mortal life also...," or, as translated by Carlyle (1831): "And though they take our life./ Goods, fame, children, wife./ Their profit is small./ These things shall vanish all./ The city of God remaineth." See: *The Mennonite Hymnal*, 1969, Nos. 597 and 325.

<sup>13</sup> Citations are from the 13<sup>th</sup> edition (Lancaster County, PA: 1962).

<sup>14</sup> *Ausbund*, Song 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ausbund*, Song 25.

<sup>16</sup> See Hillel Schwarz, "Early Anabaptist Ideas about the Nature of Children" in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47 (1973), 102-114.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> *Complete Writings*, 387.

<sup>20</sup> I remember, as a young person in the later 1940s, being impressed, and even a little envious when I saw how the new Canadian Mennonites, who had come from the Soviet Union and Germany as displaced persons, quickly paid up mortgages and climbed the economic ladder, all the family members pooling their incomes for the common goals. A similar phenomenon can be observed in contemporary Germany, where the so-called Umsiedler or Aussiedler from the former USSR generate impressive pools of earnings within their extended family and congregational units.

<sup>21</sup> Collected in Victor G. Doerksen, ed., *Fritz Senn: Gesammelte Gedichte und Prosa*, (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> See: Victor G. Doerksen, "'Our Father, Which Art in Heaven...': Some Thoughts on the Father Image in Mennonite Poetry," in *Acts of Concealment. Mennonite's Writing in Canada*, eds., Hildi Froese Tiessen and Peter Hinchcliffe (Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo Press, 1992), 39-51.

<sup>23</sup> Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, "The Sower," in *Poets of the Confederation: New Canadian Library*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Translation of Peter G. Epp, *Agatchen: A Russian Mennonite Mother's Story*, trans., Peter Pauls (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1986). Here a male author tells a woman's story.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Klassen, *Journey to Yalta* (Winnipeg, Turnstone Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>26</sup> See note #22.

<sup>27</sup> Klassen, *Journey to Yalta*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Heinrich Woelk and Gerhard Woelk, *A Wilderness Journey: Glimpses of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia, 1925-1980*, trans., Victor G. Doerksen (Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1982), 30.

<sup>29</sup> Di Brandt, *Questions I asked my mother* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1987), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Friesen, *Unearthly Horses* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1984), 15-26.

<sup>31</sup> See Elmer Suderman. "A Mennonite Father: New Poems." *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7 (1989), 96-102.

<sup>32</sup> Especially Audrey Poetker-Thiessen, *Standing all the night through* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> See note # 22.