

A Premillennialist Pacifism: The Canadian Swiss Mennonite Peace Position

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the experiences of several Canadian Swiss Mennonite groups as they faced the challenges of World War II. They sought to hold their long-standing peace positions alongside some more recently acquired prophetic, end times-oriented worldviews. These newer more pessimistic perspectives were based on a particular eschatology, that is, a view of the end times. Those perspectives deferred confidence in real improvement and peace on earth until Christ's return to usher in a thousand year reign of peace, a literal millennium at the end of time. This view, known as premillennialism, is a vision that continues to inform the Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and most fundamentalist Christians. This vision is also reflected in the thinking behind Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), the *Left Behind* movie and popular fiction series, and even the views of some hawkish, political leaders.¹ My paper focuses on the tension between deeply felt Mennonite historic peace commitments and these new premillennialist, prophecy-focused theological impulses. It attempts to identify the ways in which wartime experiences sharpened these tensions, and increased an openness to a rejection of premillennialist views and the acceptance of a new, more outward looking peace position among Canadian Swiss Mennonites during the 1950s.

In the fall of 1942, as war raged across Europe, North Africa and Russia, guest evangelist C.Z. Martin posted his great, end-time charts, depicting war, destruction and hell fire, at an Amish Mennonite Church in East Zorra, near Tavistock, Ontario. The main reason for this forceful Pennsylvania preacher's visit to East Zorra at that time was not World War II. Sixteen young men were ready to join the seven who had already declared their peace stand and their willingness to become conscientious objectors (COs). The issue at East Zorra was alcohol. Those who through revivalist fervour had become total abstainers were deeply offended by those continuing to use it. Martin started each meeting with a pre-sermon talk on the biblical book of *Revela-*

tion, using charts to expound his dispensationalist and premillennialist understandings, outlining how through seven specific “dispensations” God was directing history to an ultimate end. “It was said that his graphic portrayals of the depths of hell [at the end of time] frightened many sinners into confessing and making a new life.” He called for raised hands to signify commitments, including the renouncing of alcohol.

Bishop Daniel S. Iutzi, the pastoral leader at the East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church, honoured such revivalist renewal and insisted that it be expressed within the traditional Mennonite framework. Those feeling “the need to repent” had obviously fallen from right relationships with God and other members. They therefore needed to be put out of the church and asked to make public confession so that they could be restored. The large number of penitents, including those claiming only a new, more individualistic “assurance of salvation” placed further stress upon Iutzi’s time tested solution. Finding it hard to adjust to this “alien emphasis”, the aging bishop retired in 1948. Iutzi’s frustrated quest for consistency echoes the struggles of many Swiss Mennonites seeking to be faithful in a time of war.²

The Swiss Mennonites and Millennialism

By 1939, the Amish Mennonites were but one of several Swiss Mennonite groups concentrated in Ontario.³ Mennonites and Brethren in Christ (BICs)⁴ had migrated to Ontario from Pennsylvania in the early post-revolutionary years, beginning in 1786. Nineteenth century responses to the ideas of revivalism shattered the Mennonite organic unity. Solomon Eby’s “New Mennonites” or Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBC) demanded more revivalist innovations (1870s) whereas Abraham Martin’s Old Order Mennonites refused all such intrusions from “the worldly churches.” The Amish had arrived from Europe in the 1820s, pioneering to the west of the Waterloo County Mennonites. In the 1880s they too underwent a split, dividing into the “Church Amish” (i.e. Amish Mennonite) and the more traditional “House Amish” (i.e. Old Order Amish) over the issue of building meetinghouses.⁵ The former would accept some premillennialist teaching in the 1930s; the latter consistently rejected it.

Though there had been premillennialists (more accurately perhaps for that time, millennialists) among the early Anabaptists,⁶ Mennonites were not usually known for their focus on eschatology, that theology concerned with “the last things,” the ultimate destiny of humankind. For much of their history, they had understood the “thousand year” reign described in the 20th chapter of *Revelation* symbolically, as in

the dominant Catholic and Reformation “nonmillennial” (or “amillennial”) views. Mennonites experienced little impact from more optimistic eighteenth and nineteenth century “post-millennialism” which expected Christ’s return and reign after the church had completed its work. In the late nineteenth century, however, “historic” and “dispensational premillennialism” began making inroads into some Swiss Mennonite groups. Both forms of premillennialism teach that Christ will return before ushering in this literal thousand-year kingdom. The “dispensational” form adds the postponement theory – Jesus, frustrated in his attempts to establish the Kingdom, postponed the Kingdom and its ethics until his Second Coming and introduced the parenthesis of the Church Age, an interim time between his death on the cross and his Second Coming. These two forms of premillennialism agree on the priority for worldwide soul winning before Christ’s return and in their pessimism about social improvements and peace on earth before that Day.⁷

By 1939, Canadian Old Order Mennonite and Amish groups remained consistently nonmillennial. Revivalist groups, the MBCs and BICs, had formally adopted premillennialism as doctrine, and flirted with dispensationalism.⁸ But there was a group in between the old orders and the premillennialists. The leaders of Ontario’s large (Old) Mennonite Church (OM) and some Amish Mennonite preachers had embraced premillennial and even dispensational perspectives. The Ontario Mennonite Bible School, the main theological school of the OMs located in Kitchener, Ontario, had promoted premillennialism to the point that an outside observer, Harold S. Bender, dean of Goshen College in Indiana, observed that the Ontario OMs, known as the Ontario Conference, had “gradually converted almost completely to this position.”⁹ Historian Frank Epp, however, states that Canadian OMs “did not leave some of their old teachings as they accepted some of the new ones. . . Alongside dispensationalism there [were] Anabaptist ethics, nonconformity and nonresistance in particular.”¹⁰ Ontario Swiss Mennonites thus held the apparently contradictory ideas of premillennialism and non-resistance.

As early as 1921, Ontario OM bishop S. F. Coffman, himself an alumnus of the premillennialist Moody Bible Institute alumnus, raised some important questions:

When our preachers and workers are going around with Schofield (sic) Bibles under their arms and Moody books in their libraries and Los Angeles magazines in their hands and Toronto notes it makes us wonder: what is the Mennonite church? And for what does she stand? And how has she existed? And how will she continue to exist?¹¹

The contradictions between these values may not have been as clear cut as either premillennialist Coffman or nonmillennialist Bender saw it. In fact, many Ontario Swiss Mennonite church leaders successfully blended these in ways that initially reinforced pacifist doctrines. They grafted these newer prophecy-focused, dispensationalist worldviews onto their older nonmillennialist Anabaptist notions. And they sometimes found support for, or even reasons for accentuating it, in certain of their historic doctrines. For example, the 1632 Dordrecht Confession's two kingdom ethic had taught that true believers were "to put the sword into the sheath", however legitimately the state used it "to punish the evil and to protect the good." A premillennialist periodical popular in Canadian OM circles now blasted "false peace propagandists" for trying to stop inevitable "wars and rumours of wars". Under this theology, even a more circumspect Mennonite minister, J.B. Martin, would denounce "worldly pacifism" as "a Satanic delusion" intent on leading the church into "the clutches of modernistic and liberalistic leaders."¹² This new premillennialist eschatology, then, helped distance the nonresistant Mennonites from secular or liberal Christian peace travellers and "introduced new elements into the dualistic ethic of Mennonites, namely a rationalisation and justification of violence by the state."¹³

Sometimes, however, these new premillennialist perspectives undermined older peace convictions. Much Anabaptist Mennonite ethical thought had been grounded in the life, ministry and teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5-7. In at least one sermon, popular Kitchener, Ontario bishop and evangelist Clayton F. Derstine expounded the common dispensational conclusion that "The Sermon on the Mount is not the Gospel of Christ; neither is the Gospel of Christ found in this sermon." Rather, he argued, the Sermon on the Mount is "the Magna Charta of the earthly kingdom of the Messiah," the millennium, the thousand year reign of peace yet to come. The Sermon on the Mount, therefore, was not a blueprint for social reform in this age. However consistently Derstine used the concept of "non-resistance" from Matthew 5 as the doctrinal term for Mennonite conscientious objectors, he actually supported it with Scripture from elsewhere. For example, he often cited John 18, Matthew 26 and Hebrews 12 to support his description of the kingdom's servants as non-resistant and peace loving. Throughout this period, as World News editor for the *Christian Monitor*, Derstine offered his distinctive blend of Mennonite-flavoured dispensational commentary. He often noted the premillennialist view that those "interested in the prophetic content of the Bible have a place in their hearts for the Jew" who "is cuddling closer to the Christian church than any other group of people."¹⁴

According to historian Frank Epp, commonly this “dual emphasis produced contradictions.”¹⁵ Would they approach a given issue with their deeply embedded Anabaptist values, or by newly acquired premillennial “insights” and their strange new dispensational preoccupation? Wartime experiences would challenge some of those seemingly contradictory approaches and preoccupations. Fortunately, for Conscientious Objection’s sake, Mennonites who agreed with East Zorra’s bishop, Daniel S. Iutzi, found ways of temporarily holding competing theological impulses in tension.

Nine months into the Second World War, Ontario OMs gathered to hear conference sermons on the familiar premillennial themes of apostasy and “The Present World Prophetic Outlook.” Before leaving Rainham Church, the delegates urged that “the premillennial view of prophecy... be given consideration in the teaching of (Goshen) College.¹⁶ Their attention was riveted on the signs that must precede *Revelation 20*’s literal “thousand year” reign of peace – worldwide evangelization, a great apostasy, wars, and the rise of the Antichrist.

Perhaps this view did not undermine their commitment to conscientious objection during the war. But their fascination with prophetic perspectives eventually did divert attention from their peace teaching, narrowed its Scriptural underpinnings and application, and limited their cooperation with peace minded groups deemed more liberal and less biblicist.

Taking a Quiet Stand for Peace

Peace church preparations for the wartime program are best seen as an inter-church and bi-national effort.¹⁷ In September 1940, Peace Church leaders in Canada met with the Deputy Minister of National War Services to offer “help in working out problems arising out of our position on war and peace.” Presumably, in keeping with recent church resolutions, they sought to do so, “manifest[ing] a weak and submissive spirit, being obedient unto the laws and regulations of the government in all things, except in such cases where the obedience to the government would cause us to violate the teachings of the Scriptures.”¹⁸

Early to mid-century Mennonite appeals to the government were focused primarily on securing conscience-based exemptions for their own people. The First World War’s “Mennonite in Ottawa”, S. F. Coffman, continued to advise against “establishing too close a relationship with the political powers.” This apolitical separatism persists in the 1949 Ontario Mennonite Bible School faculty motion “that we refrain from signing the petition against publishing crime

comics in Canada” because of “the legislative implications in it and possible misunderstanding...”¹⁹ These leaders’ eschatology had sharpened Dordrecht’s 1632 separation of the two kingdoms, and weakened any justification for civic engagement.

Now the major task was ensuring that their young Mennonite men took a stand. Members of these Swiss groups have lamented the lack of peace education between the wars. “Our preachers did not preach it... and the time to preach on it is not after the war starts.”²⁰ Within this theological atmosphere, draft age young men needed to formulate and act upon their convictions. Fortunately, powerful models, a legacy of Scriptural teaching, some helpful pastoral support and their leaders’ ability to live with conflicting theological urges helped many draftees to take personal stands for nonresistance.²¹

Conscientious objectors report various motivations. Where some admit to taking this position primarily to appease family pressures, others allude to long-term convictions nourished within their families and churches. When Sam Martin from Alberta’s Duchess Mennonite Church was called before a hostile Mobilization Board judge, he “quoted various Scripture passages” including several from the Sermon on the Mount. The story of draft age E. J. Swalm’s heroic resistance to induction during the First War inspired young men of his own BIC and other denominations.²²

Conscientious objectors in the alternative service camps, however, sensed that government and church leaders were “just trying to keep [them] out of the limelight.” Military Problems Committee members noted the desirability of removing conscientious objectors from the community so as to “relieve the tension here... the public sentiment against them.” Amish Mennonite preacher Jacob R. Bender urged the young conscientious objectors to stay away from town, “not to mingle with others, and thus avoid bringing condemnation down on their heads.”²³

Such a posture reflected Swiss Mennonite experience and current theology. Their “cautious sense of peoplehood” was drawn more from years as “Die Stillen im Lande” (the Quiet in the Land) than from their Anabaptist heritage of prophetic dissent. Within these Swiss groups, the “twin non’s,” nonconformity (or plain dress) and nonresistance, were often found in tandem. Ontario’s “big four” OM leaders talked of these as “extra fundamentals,” ways to live “holy” lives in an evil world. Their premillennialist eschatology “helped to strengthen rather than to destroy adherence to nonresistance by reinforcing Mennonite separatism and quietism.”²⁴ In the years leading up to World War II, the BICs likewise tightened the linkage between these “twin non’s.” In response to Canadian and other calls for clearer directives, their 1937 general conference issued “plain dress” regulations. Compliance with

this dress code became a condition for determining whether a young Canadian draftee was a member in good standing.²⁵

Many Canadian Swiss Mennonites thus entered this critical period with what amounted to a posture of withdrawal from the wider world. In this wartime context, their nonconformity, separatism and quietism would create tension with impulses rooted in their doctrine of nonresistance and in their eschatology.

Outward Looking Elements: Service, Citizenship and Salvation

That tension became especially evident in the quests for meaningful alternative service, for an identity as responsible Mennonite citizens, and for effective ways to share the gospel of salvation. Service, citizenship and salvation were all outward focused, whereas much of the rationale offered for conscientious objection had been rooted in more inward focused values.

Alternative Service Work camp experiences broadened the horizons for young Swiss Mennonites. “Conchies” (conscientious objectors) report becoming “more tolerant...not so ingrown” as they got “to know and appreciate other Christians.” It became more difficult to say “my way is the only one.” The camps “widened social and spiritual horizons,”²⁶ provided opportunity to clarify and strengthen peace convictions, introduced new doctrinal ferment, and significant frustrations.

BIC documents of this period continued to couple nonresistance with remaining “aloof from the larger world.” Yet “elaborations on nonresistance exhibit countervailing sentiments. Service and neighborliness, for example, suggest outward looking elements.” The August 1937 (Old) Mennonite Church annual conference statement, adopted at Turner, Oregon, pledged OM willingness “at all times to aid in the relief of those in need, suffering or distress.”²⁷

The work camps had drawn inspiration from Guy F. Hershberger’s progressive proposals about conscientious objectors offering some meaningful “ministry of service.” Certain assignments such as fighting forest fires had obvious value. Other “make-work” projects seemed “insignificant yet an alternative to war.” Many conscientious objectors sensed that “they were wasting their time, by and large.” There were few opportunities for service outside the camps. Swiss Mennonite church leaders opposed noncombatant service under military auspices. There were assignments such as Edna Hunsperger’s or John E. Coffman’s Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) work in England, “relieving the suffering and distress which follows in the wake of...war and carnal strife,” but these were rare. Pleas for funds, clothing

or personnel almost always resulted in surpluses. The files of the Nonresistant Relief Organisation (NRRO) report generous responses from Old Order and mainline groups.²⁸

In April, 1943, Conference of Historic Peace Churches (CHPC) secretary J. Harold Sherk wrote to the Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services, Major L.R. LaFleche, requesting an interview to explore the possibility of training alternative service workers for post-war relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation overseas. LaFleche's initial terse reply was "that all should help win the War and that those who do not do so can hardly hope for a share in the fruits of the sacrifices which should be made by all." Was LaFleche validating the suspicions that Paul Comley French (a Quaker and Director for the National Service Board for Religious Objectors in the U.S.) would raise in his 1944 report on the Canadian Alternative Service Work program? French wondered "whether the government planned to make the situation so that it would appear to returned soldiers that conscientious objectors had made little sacrifice for their beliefs."²⁹

Historian James C. Juhnke postulates that the "motivational sources of Mennonite benevolent institutions and behaviour" may well be found within the civic identity crisis caused by their conscientious inability to "fulfill the popular requirements of citizenship in a war making nation." Such "benevolence is the Mennonite attempt to discover a moral equivalent for war."³⁰

For some conscientious objectors, the seemingly insignificant work and the sense of public disparagement became powerful stimuli toward considering enlisting or reshaping their future lifestyle and beliefs. One who found it extremely difficult to "sit in that passive atmosphere" quipped that his later long-term Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) involvement was "to make up for the frustration I experienced in World War II." Several of his peers have cited their frustrated youthful idealism as motivation for their later enthusiastic endorsement of Voluntary Service, Heifer Projects, MCC, MDS – "visible and viable expressions of concern for our fellow man..." Several Swiss Mennonites were among the "seagoing cowboys" tending post-war shipments of horses and heifers to war devastated Europe. Failing to find meaningful "ministry of service" within the camps, many became even more determined to find such arenas.³¹ Their yearnings, these broader relief and service ministries now being imagined, moved far beyond that earlier separatism.

During their century and a half in Canada, Swiss OMs and BICs had not lived in isolation. Like their American counterparts, they were moving from a rural medieval notion of themselves as "subjects" toward accepting "in a Mennonite way the expectations and responsi-

bilities of modern... citizenship.”³² For centrist Swiss Mennonites, older assumptions about withdrawal from the wider world no longer fit their experience and sense of faithfulness.

From their heritage and changing context, other postures could be envisaged. Unlike many of his peers and successors, Waterloo County’s first Mennonite bishop, Benjamin Eby, had engaged his neighbours and civil authorities in broader questions. He tried to form a benefit society for the “poor, sick and otherwise suffering Germans, native or alien, without denominational distinction.” He petitioned the government to use the weapons of the Christian, “namely the shield of faith and the sword of prayer,” and looked toward the day when “all governments” and “all Christians will know that waging war... [is] of the devil.”³³

As his Kitchener congregation urbanised, Eby’s successors returned to these themes with new expression and urgency. In the 1930s, under the dual influences of his dispensationalist premillennialism and his innate Anabaptist compassion, Mennonite minister C.F. Derstine enthusiastically promoted the local relief work of Joseph Cramer, a converted Polish Jew. In his *Christian Monitor* column, he even called for Mennonites to become “Pioneers in the Greatest Movement in the world,” arguing that now is “an opportune time for Quakers, Mennonites and others to do their propagating of the biblical teachings on war and peace.”³⁴ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Edgar Metzler’s far-reaching and controversial *Gospel Herald* articles and his work as chair of the MCC Peace Section promoted a clearer witness against conscription and war, a “way to speak prophetically.” These once “docile subjects” were finding “a new voice,” speaking out against domestic and foreign policies they “deemed unjust.”³⁵

The older position of withdrawal from the world was similarly unable to come to channel the powerful outward impulses rooted within their eschatology. Premillennialism had always emphasized the priority of evangelism, the soul winning that must happen before Christ’s return and implementation of the thousand year reign of peace.

War era reactions may have limited early Alternative Service Worker attempts to conduct street services to save “the sinning populace” of nearby towns. Within the alternative service camps, they had more success at “quickening” or “reviving” Old Order co-religionists than in converting heterodox or mainline pacifists. One conscientious objector reported that “this evening I have asked [the visiting preacher] to speak on the second coming of Christ in the form of an evangelistic service.” In 1941 J.B. Martin had assured Old Order Mennonite colleagues that the CHPC expected the conscientious objectors at the camps, “the boys”, to return “more loyal” to their original congregations. His 1943 camp tour report attributed spiritual improvements to the fact that “a number of the boys were converted

and others led to a deeper spiritual experience.” Traditional Amish and Mennonites welcoming these experiences and doctrines could find difficulties back home.³⁶

By 1948, this evangelistic urge would lead the MBCs to change their name to United Missionary Church, largely to prevent their evangelistic efforts being “hindered because of the Mennonite name” and confusion with more conservative pacifist groups.³⁷ The BIC’s association with other evangelical and holiness groups would soon move them to choose “less legalism and more burning passion to tell the good news of salvation.” Their codes for plain dress were the first to change. In 1958, after automatic excommunication and an ambitious “indoctrination movement” failed to lower the levels of military enlistment, the BIC leadership saw no alternative but to rescind the disciplinary actions while at the same time reaffirming their nonresistant doctrine. Their eschatology had been more successful in motivating soul winning than in supporting nonresistance.³⁸

Wartime experiences tore at the threads that had stitched together their older Anabaptist convictions and these newer prophetic worldviews. Those most persuaded by the new premillennialist eschatologies found little room remaining for those older peace commitments. Those called toward new ministries of “service and neighborliness” would find inadequate support from an eschatology that, to quote a modern student of premillennialism, “cut the nerve to social action by those who adhere to it.”³⁹ Over the next several decades, Mennonites would seek ways to apply their peace teachings in new arenas – criminal justice, local and global conflict resolution. These principles would be seen, not as merely the peculiar ethics of a particular people, but as having universal application, even among governments. Richard C. Detweiler has suggested that “by 1950 it was becoming clear that either an adequate undergirding for peace witness to the state must be developed, or else witness must be viewed primarily within the context of a ‘strategy of withdrawal’.”⁴⁰ Outside the most traditional groups, such withdrawal no longer seemed a faithful option. Could the prevalent eschatology allow and inform these new explorations and engagement?

Facing the Fifties

When in 1952, Harold S. Bender suggested that the Ontario (Old) Mennonite Conference had “converted almost completely” to premillennialism, he may not have been aware of recent rumblings. At their 1951 sessions, the chairman at the premillennialist Ontario Bible School presented a proposed slate of teachers, noting a controversy

about one of them. The school's principal, Oscar Burkholder, stood up to speak against teacher John Garber's nonmillennialist "teaching of eschatology." It was vintage Burkholder – logical, impassioned, biblical – and when he sat down, it seemed obvious that he had once again carried the day, showing that nonmillennialist Garber was simply too heretical to be accepted as a teacher. During Burkholder's speech, Garber sat quietly in his chair. Just before the vote was called, he raised his hand and requested permission to speak. There was quiet in the room as Garber began with, "I'd like to read for you a passage." He read a short statement about the resurrection, something with obviously nonmillennial leanings. "This represents the viewpoint that I have been teaching. It is from the Dordrecht Confession," the old 1632 Mennonite statement of faith. He sat down.⁴¹ In 1940, the Bible School's supporting body, the Ontario Mennonite conference, had demanded that Goshen College in Indiana join it in teaching premillennialism. A decade later, this same conference refused to silence an outspoken amillennialist whose teaching and example were encouraging others to change or to declare their nonmillennial stands.⁴²

The story of that theological change is rooted in the relationships between Canadian Swiss Mennonite leaders and their American educators. Goshen College's Harold S. Bender was widely considered "a leading amillennialist," yet Ontario's S. F. Coffman could recommend him as his reliable replacement for a crucial conference. Moreover, minister J. B. Martin deemed Bender one of his warmest friends. Already during the war, the first of several Ontario pastors were studying at the nonmillennial Goshen seminary.⁴³

In 1944, two important publications began to describe a "third way". Harold S. Bender's "The Anabaptist Vision" and Guy F. Hershberger's *War, Peace and Nonresistance* offered the church alternatives to some of their earlier polarisations. These writings would invite some new ways of understanding, undergirding and extending their peace witness and service.⁴⁴

I began this paper by mentioning Bishop Daniel Iutzi and Revivalist C. Z. Martin, proponents of various, distinctive theological emphases common in Canadian Swiss Mennonite communities as World War II began. Each group, perhaps each leader and member, made his or her own synthesis of these and other threads. These various Mennonite groups, however, faced a common challenge, namely, assisting their draft age men to remain faithful to their historic Anabaptist nonresistant principles. The resulting Alternative Service Worker camps made their own contribution to the theological ferment. As wartime experiences challenged the old position of withdrawal from the world, outward impulses inherent within both nonresistance and their eschatology demanded further expression.

Those preferring Bishop Iutzi's communitarian understandings of the church would shore up their social boundaries with more stringent discipline, more successfully within the nonmillennialist tradition than in centrist, premillennialist and evangelical groups. Others, more inclined toward C. Z. Martin's evangelistic, premillennialist eschatology, would partner with evangelical groups and loosen Anabaptist ties.

The War's end would see the MBCs moving to drop the Mennonite name and ultimately nonresistance itself.⁴⁵ The BICs would forge new alliances with Evangelical and Holiness movements, as well as with Mennonite Central Committee. The presiding bishops and this "association with Mennonite groups and participation in their peace and relief activities"⁴⁶ are credited with strengthening the postwar peace position among Canadian BICs.

Amish Mennonites and (Old) Mennonites were now moving toward a more formal, shared denominational identity.⁴⁷ Relationships nurtured through their wartime cooperation, as well as emerging new leadership, would allow for some other ways out of the C.Z. Martin-Daniel Iutzi dilemma, ways inspired by "The Anabaptist Vision" of Harold S. Bender and his colleagues. Through their work, many would find support for reclaiming a prophetic heritage.

I close with church archivist Leonard Gross's description of the bi-national OM denomination's struggle following its early twentieth century forays into fundamentalism. Gross's comments apply also to the journey of many of these Canadian Swiss Mennonites:

And it took the very best efforts of a team of brethren, beginning in 1924 and culminating in 1944, to bring about a changeover, back to the ways of history and faith as the sum and substance of Christianity, as defined by the many Mennonite heroes of faith across the centuries. It would take World War II to help ease the Mennonite Church out of certain ways that proved less compatible with the traditional spirit and substance of a loving discipleship, fulfilled within community. A new Mennonite generation arose, now ready for broader horizons of learning. Foreign languages became the tools of hundreds of relief workers, and human suffering was understood from new perspectives and dealt with holistically.⁴⁸

Notes

¹ For a popular history of this and other prophetic movements, including their more recent manifestation see: Richard Kyle, *The Last Days are Here Again: A History*

- of the End Times (Grand Rapids, 1998). For more information on premillennialism, see Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1925* (Chicago, 1999) and Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, 1992).
- ² This account has been reconstructed from Hugh Laurence and Lorraine Roth, *Daniel S. Iutzi, Jacob R. Bender: Servants of God and the Church* (Waterloo, 1984), 40-41 and Fred Lichti, *A History of the East Zorra (Amish) Mennonite Church 1837-1977* (Tavistock, 1977), 88-91. East Zorra preacher Jacob R. Bender and bishop Daniel S. Iutzi had been active in inter-Mennonite peace work through the Conference of Historic Peace Churches (hereafter CHPC) and the Military Problems Committee. C. Z. Martin, whose Lancaster Conference discouraged dispensational teaching, welcomed opportunities to use his prophetic charts outside that conference.
 - ³ In this paper, the popular terminology, “Swiss,” refers to their origins among the Swiss/South German rather than the Dutch/North German Anabaptists. Though they remained concentrated in Ontario, Swiss Mennonites (Old Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren in Christ) also founded churches in Alberta and Saskatchewan beginning in the 1890s, to be joined there a decade later by the Brethren in Christ. There were no distinctly Amish Mennonite congregations outside Ontario, though Amish names are common in western Canadian OM congregations. In order to minimize confusion from similar sounding names, in this paper I have opted to use the following names or acronyms: OM (Old Mennonite) for the main group of Pennsylvania derived Mennonites; BIC (Brethren in Christ); MBC (Mennonite Brethren in Christ); Amish Mennonites (for the majority of the descendants of the 1822 Amish immigrants). The term ASW will occasionally be used for the Alternative Service Work camps.
 - ⁴ Most of these early BIC immigrants were first generation converts from Mennonite backgrounds. For the purposes of this paper, I consider them “Swiss Mennonites” although they have a mixed theological ancestry and identity.
 - ⁵ Further groups had been created through splinters. The Old Orders were fragmented by the stricter “David Martin” splinter (1917), and the Waterloo Markham Old Orders (1930s). Dissent within the “Church Amish” created the intermediate Nafziger (1903) and Lichti (1911) congregations.
 - ⁶ Despite some millennial tributaries among early Anabaptists, the writings of Menno Simons, the 1632 *Dordrecht Confession* and Daniel Kauffman’s 1928 *Doctrines of the Bible* continued Anabaptism’s more common nonmillennialism or amillennialism. Among Dutch/North German Anabaptists, the nickname Mennist or Mennonite was initially used (by their opponents) to distinguish Menno’s peaceable nonmillennialists from Muenster’s millennialist revolutionaries.
 - ⁷ For a Mennonite work that mustered historical and biblical arguments in support of nonmillennialism, praying that God might raise up leaders “to send Premillennialism over the Niagara Falls of His own precious Word” (362) see Ira D. Landis, *The Faith of Our Fathers on Eschatology* (Lititz, 1946). Post-millennialism inspired Jonathan Edwards, Charles G. Finney and many of the other leaders for 18th and 19th century Great Awakenings, Evangelicalism, Abolitionist and Social Gospel movements. Throughout the nineteenth century, “Premillennial” movements struggled to assert their more pessimistic perspectives, spawning various new sects (e.g. Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses) and ultimately bolstering the Fundamentalist reaction to Modernism. Dispensational Premillennialism, originally developed by John Nelson Darby in the mid 1800’s, sees God working in human affairs in a different way in each of seven dispensations. In the rest of this essay, we will use the more common term, Dispensationalism. Its popularization was a bi-national phenomenon. The Canadian Niagara Bible Conferences, the American Moody Bible Institute and Scofield Bible (with its extensive Dispensationalist footnotes) each had a profound impact in both

countries. Note the significant implications of this postponement theory for an Anabaptist faith family that has historically emphasised the Sermon on the Mount. In their contributions to Loren Johns, ed., *Apocalypticism and Millennialism* (Kitchener, 2000), William V. Trollinger and Donald Durnbaugh document this eschatology's negative impact on the peace stances of a school, a denomination and a local church leader. The book's Introduction (pp.11-12) also offers a brief summation of Mennonite introduction to and experiences with this theology.

- ⁸ The MBCs and BICs had formally adopted premillennialism as a doctrine, the MBCs by 1896, the BICs by 1906. In "The Impact of Dispensationalism on Brethren in Christ Eschatology" in *Brethren in Christ History and Life* (III, 1980), 45, N. Curtis Byers notes that a full blown Darbyite dispensationalism was first taught in an 11 part series in *Evangelical Visitor* in 1895; the writer, Enos Hess, later became president of Messiah College.
- ⁹ According to Urie Bender, *Four Earthen Vessels: Biographical Profiles of Oscar Burkholder, Samuel F. Coffman, Clayton F. Derstine and Jesse B. Martin* (Kitchener, 1982), these four influential OM leaders in Ontario were all premillennialists, one of them a convinced Dispensationalist. In the United States, while most regions and leaders retained the older nonmillennial posture, significant pockets of premillennial influence included the constituency of Virginia's Eastern Mennonite School, and *The Sword and Trumpet* magazine's neoconservatives. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: 1786-1920, I*, (Toronto, 1974), 276, observes that revivalist and doctrinal controversies entered the Amish Mennonites somewhat more slowly than their Mennonite counterparts. East Zorra preacher, Jacob R. Bender, for example, was a premillennialist. Dean Bender's comments were printed in *Prophecy Conference: Report of Conference Held at Elkhart, Indiana, April 3-5, 1952* (Scottsdale, 1952), 57.
- ¹⁰ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: 1920-1940, II* (Toronto, 1982), 558. Bishop Clarence Ramer of the Duchess Mennonite Church in Alberta would be another Swiss church leader fascinated enough with millennialism to speak frequently at Bible Conferences on "Signs of the End Times." For his support for the peace testimony and witness of his beleaguered member, Sam Martin, see William Janzen and Frances Greaser, *Sam Martin Went to Prison: The Story of Conscientious Objection and Canadian Military Service* (Kindred: Winnipeg, 1990) 21ff and T.D. Regehr, *Faith, Life and Witness in the Northwest, 1903-2003* (Pandora: Kitchener, 2003), 141,172-6.
- ¹¹ March 21, 1921 letter to J. E. Hartzler, cited in Bender, *Four Earthen Vessels*, 50. In Swiss Mennonite and BIC circles, nonconformity (the focus of Coffman's comment) and nonresistance "were often the same issue and concern." (Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, II, 565.
- ¹² George R. Brunk, "Pacifism - Nonresistance," *The Sword and Trumpet* (October, 1929), 6. Oscar Burkholder of Breslau, Ontario, was a regular contributor to this journal whose name suggests a more bellicose spirit than one might expect among pacifist Mennonites. Bruce L. Gunether, "Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites in Canada," *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed., George A. Rawlyk (Montreal, 1997), 228-29, cites an unnamed article in the *Gospel Herald* 18 (28 January 1929): 898. Though Guenther mistakenly calls J.B. Martin a dispensationalist, he correctly intuits the ways in which Martin's millennialism undergirds his approach to nonresistance. Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: from Quietism to Activism* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 1994), 70, cites Rodney J. Sawatsky's 1977 doctoral dissertation describing these competing perspectives as a "chiliast separatist nonresistance" versus an activist "politically reformist pacifism."
- ¹³ C. Norman Kraus, "Reexamining Mennonite Reality", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 60 (1978), 160. Note that with Kitchener's dispensationalist Derstine, this

tended to happen more when he was commenting on sensational murders than on war mongering.

- ¹⁴ C. F. Derstine Collection (courtesy E. R. Good), Hist. Mss, Eastern Mennonite College.) See *Christian Monitor*, 32 July 1940, 223. Such sentiments may lie behind the OM executive's curious 1939 note to the Non-Resistant Relief Organisation favouring "the increased immigration of Christian Jews into Canada, as suggested and advocated by several sources outside our committee." (S.F. Coffman files, letter to SFC from Gilbert Bergey, Nov. 15, 1939, Historical Mss., Mennonite Archives of Ontario (hereafter MAO).
- ¹⁵ Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, II, 559-562. Epp documents intriguing apparent contradictions in dispensationalist C.F. Derstine's writing (in the *Christian Monitor*), evidences of powerful yet conflicting theological urges. Thus we have statements about "remaining aloof from politics" yet it being wrong to remain silent in the face of evils. He warns that no genuine improvement could come before the last dispensation, yet the best way to fight communism might be with the "Social Creed" of the "liberal" Council of Churches.
- ¹⁶ *Calendar of Appointments*, June 4, 5 and 6, 1940, 6-7, 24.
- ¹⁷ Several inter-church initiatives deserve mention. The NRRO (Nonresistant Relief Organisation) was created in 1917 by Mennonite and BIC churches to deal with issues related to nonresistance, and to collect relief funds in appreciation for past exemptions. In 1946, the NRRO affiliated with the CHPC (Conference of Historic Peace Churches). The CHPC included Mennonite, BIC as well as Friends (Quaker) and Old Order groups. Formed in 1940, it became the umbrella group for work on exemption and alternative service questions. In August 1939, a joint committee of the MBC and BIC presented to the Prime Minister "Memorials" concerning their nonresistant stand. The MBC Memorial was based on the OM Turner declaration but omitted statements opposing noncombatant service under military auspices. There was significant interaction between the Canadian and American branches of each Swiss Mennonite group, sometimes further fostered by birth, education, family and friendship connections. Canadian BICs led their denomination by preparing to issue certificates of exemption as early as 1935. Ontario's J. B. Martin joined the church-wide Mennonite Peace Problems Committee in 1930. Canadian OMs participated in bi-national Peace conferences and helped craft the 1937 joint Turner statement on peace.
- ¹⁸ That 1940 meeting is described in J. B. Martin, "The Churches and Official Contacts with the Government," CHPC files, Hist. Mss., MAO. Note that this offer had been crafted in collaboration with their American colleagues. This reference to the Turner resolution is cited by Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 567 from "Peace, War and Military Service" (a Statement of the Position of the Mennonite Church: Resolution adopted by the Mennonite General Conference at Turner, Oregon, August, 1937) in *Conference Minutes*, 123-126.
- ¹⁹ Cited in David W. Franssen, "Canadian Mennonites and Conscientious Objectors in World War II," (M.A. Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1977), 167. OMBS & OMBI, Faculty minutes, March 10, 1949, Hist, Mss., MAO.
- ²⁰ There had been a call for teaching about "war industry" questions, such as food production "expressly for the supply of military men." At war's end, Ontario's Wainfleet district BIC leaders felt the need to apologise for failing to adequately teach their peace stand regarding these issues. See M. J. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Witness through Three Generations* (Kent, OH, 2003), 51, 82. Paul Knowles quotes from an interview with MBC churchman and historian Everek R. Storms in his "New Mennonite to Non Mennonite: Study in Assimilation" (Undergraduate Paper: University of Waterloo, 1979), 15. For less pithy parallel sentiments, see Everek R. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church* (Elkhart, 1958), 231. Similar comments may be found in BIC and Mennonite circles, such as Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 50-51.

- ²¹ Some were fortunate enough to have a pastor like Amish Mennonite preacher Jacob R. Bender who “would counsel young men and help them formulate their convictions... accompany them to the draft board, to stand behind them and help them face examinations.” (Laurence and Roth, *Daniel S. Iutzi*, 49. Though precise and reliable statistics for the various Canadian Swiss groups are not readily available, estimates of the percentage of Canadian Amish and (Old) Mennonite groups taking the CO stand in ASW camps are comparable or very slightly higher than for their American counterparts. The Canadian MBC and BIC churches had significantly higher proportions of CO’s than their American counterparts. Approximately half the MBC and 85% of the BIC Canadian draftees chose alternative service, whereas practically all the American MBCs and 2/3 of the American BICs entered the armed services. Data from Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 231; Melvin Gingerich, *Service for Peace* (Akron, 1949), .87.
- ²² Janzen and Greaser, *Sam Martin Went to War*, 14. Martin quoted “Matthew 5:39, 43 and 44; John 18:36; 2 Corinthians 10:3, 4; and James 4:1 and 2.” Martin also reports that, during later times of self questioning, words from the “Sermon on the Mount” were especially convincing. (p.24) E.J. Swalm, *Nonresistance Under Test* (Nappanee, 1938) was a powerful story that was reissued twice more during the war. CO Harold Heisey from Gormley, Ontario, for example, gave credit to Swalm: “How can we forget ... the mighty eloquent way he defended the peace position?” Cited in Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 50.
- ²³ Frank H. Epp files of Noah Bearinger, p.8, MAO. Leaders remembered well the “public harassment and antagonism” rampant against those COs who stayed home during the previous war. (Alternative Service W.W.II., Elven Shantz, Hist. Mss. (Oral History), MAO.
- ²⁴ Perry Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 9. Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 49, speaks of these “twins.” Guenther, “Living with the Virus,” 228-229, notes that “The Mennonite tradition of nonconformity was similar to the evangelical desire that Christians live ‘holy’ lives.” He adds that in both Mennonite and evangelical circles, the taboos resulting from “an unfortunate juxtaposition of culture and faith... often degenerated into a judgmental legalism”
- ²⁵ E. Morris Sider, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada: Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change* (Nappanee: Evangel, 1988), 242. The Canadian Black Creek District was among those whose calls for clearer directives led to the 1937 “plain dress” regulations. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 75, cites an interview with Dorothy Sherk whose brother, killed on an RCAF training flight, had not become a church member because of its “emphasis on small matters, like proscribing neckties.”
- ²⁶ “Conchies” was a term they frequently used for themselves in their camp newsletters. When MBC pastor J. Harold Sherk died in 1974, “The friendships made in the camps at that time were translated into warm tributes as many of those who learned to know him there, including a large contingent of Old Order men, came to pay their last respects...” David Kroeker, “The Boys from CO Camps remembered J. Harold Sherk” in *Mennonite Reporter*, April 1, 1974. This section is informed by comments from RJ, LB, AS, DJ, AB, ES, IB, Alternative Service, W.W. II, Hist. Mss. 22.1.3, (Oral History), MAO. The “horizons” comment is from E. Morris, Sider, “Life and Labor in the Alternate Service Work Camps in Canada During World War II,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66 (1992), 596
- ²⁷ Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 52. Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 43, cites this from “Peace, War and Military Service” (A Statement of the Position of the Mennonite Church: Resolution adopted by the Mennonite General Conference at Turner, Oregon, August, 1937) in *Conference Minutes*, pp.123-124.
- ²⁸ At the 1935 bi-national Mennonite Conference on War and Peace, Hershberger had urged Mennonite leaders to work toward a “program of alternative service,” since such a “ministry of service” would be “a very fitting example” and could

- help counter public sentiment against nonresistant Christians. His suggestive paper was published as Guy F. Hershberger, "Is Alternative Service Desirable and Possible?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 9 (1935), 20-36. Louis Heisey's sentiment about "wasting time" (interview by author in Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 131) is often paralleled in Alternate Service W.W. II (WH, EB, OS), Oral History, MAO, and in Sider, "Life and Labor," 581-2, 586-7. Sider offers more detailed descriptions of both meaningful and "make work" assignments. Generosity is documented in S.F. Coffman, NRRO, Sept. 15, 1941, Hist. Mss., MAO. Edna Hunsperger spent three and a half years in England after her ready response to C.F. Derstine's postcard: "M.C.C. would like to send two nurses to England. Would you consider this assignment?" Ken Bechtel, *Strangers Within the Gates: Wanner Mennonite Church 1837-1987* (Kitchener, 1987), 74.
- ²⁹ J. H. Sherk, April 20, 1943, Hist. Mss., CHPC, Box 2, MAO. French's report, "Alternative Service Program for Canadian Conscientious Objectors," 10, is cited in Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 421. French, the Quaker director for the American National Service Board for Religious Objectors, submitted this report in September 1944.
- ³⁰ J. C. Juhnke, "Mennonite Benevolence and Civic Identity," *Mennonite Life* (January 1970), 34-37.
- ³¹ Quotations from EB, FC, Alternative Service (Oral History), MAO.
- ³² Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 9, 11, 13. Bush uses sociologist Milton Gordon's term "acculturation" (as opposed to "assimilation") to describe the ways in which Mennonites moved toward fuller participation as citizens.
- ³³ E. Reginald Good, *Frontier Community to Urban Congregation: First Mennonite Church 1813-1988* (Waterloo, 1988), 58. Note also Eby's collaboration with Lutheran publisher Henry Peterson, cooperation with other denominations and his baptism of converts from Reformed and other backgrounds. Good cites evidence to support his contention that this interdenominational initiative was vetoed by his fellow ministers. Other Eby references cited in Good, *Frontier Community*, 59.
- ³⁴ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto, 1996), 174, briefly describes the early days of Cramer's House of Friendship. The "greatest movement", i.e. the peace movement, is referred to in *Christian Monitor*, 26 (July 1934), 222 and (February, 1934), 59.
- ³⁵ Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 196-7. Bush cites *Gospel Herald* articles from 1957 and 1962, Metzler's endorsement of resistance to conscription, the resulting controversy and more positive response. Metzler became chair of the MCC Peace Section in 1962. Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 58, describes this finding of a new voice.
- ³⁶ Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 55. Military Problems Committee, letter from Harold Schmidt, Aug. 16, 1942., July 3, 1941 CHPC files, Hist Mss., MAO. Mss. J. B. Martin, Report to 8th Session, CHPC, Oct. 14, 1943, Hist, MAO. Note that this revivalism is in direct opposition to values cherished by Old Order groups. A western OM pastor likewise expressed his serious concerns about the influence within the camps of the Plymouth Brethren. (Letter from M.D. Stutzman, Dec. 23, 1943, Military Problems Committee, Hist. Mss, MAO.) One Old Order Amish turned Mennonite associates his "salvation" with hearing the other campees and the preachers talk freely of "being saved." When he returned to his home community and established a study fellowship to spread this, he found himself outside the Old Order church. (Mss. 22.1.3 Oral History Alternative Service. W.W.II, Hist, MAO.
- ³⁷ Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 80; See also Knowles, "New Mennonite to Non Mennonite," 21. Note how this evangelistic priority was used to justify their explicit repudiation of connection with other peace minded Christians (and ultimately with this doctrine.) Already during World War I, the MBCs had chosen not to exercise discipline on the military issue.

- ³⁸ Sider, *The Brethren in Christ*, 245, gives this summary of the key points of historic sermon at 1950 General Conference. See also C.O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience* (Nappanee, 1978), 389, 392. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 167-8, also offers some provocative commentary on the role of “individualism” (as opposed to communal emphases) and “historylessness” in these struggles.
- ³⁹ Robert Clouse, “The Evangelical Christian, Social Concern,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 44 (1972), 73. A historian more sympathetic to this eschatology asserts that it may have been “difficult for dispensationalists within the MCO to concur with a strategy that prioritized relief and service efforts.” Guenther, “Living with the Virus,” 7.
- ⁴⁰ Richard C Detweiler, *Mennonite Statements on Peace: 1915-1966* (Scottsdale, 1968), 57.
- ⁴¹ Many of these details about the event are from a personal interview with Arnold Cressman, May 13, 1987. Kraus, “Reexamining Mennonite Reality,” 157, suggests that the first fifty years of debate over these new eschatologies “took the form of defending the Mennonite tradition against an innovation or justifying the innovation as legitimately Mennonite.” Neither Burkholder nor Garber left any doubts about which side they took.
- ⁴² In 1952, the board again requested Garber to “keep his teaching on Eschatology to a minimum.” O.M.B.S. and O.M.B.I., Board Minutes (March 19, 1952), Hist. Mss, MAO. They admitted, however, that through these encounters, “The existence of several views came to light in the conference when for years it was thought Ontario was 100% premillennialist.” Newton Gingerich and J. Martin, *Mission Completed: History of the Ontario Mennonite Bible School* (St Jacobs, ON, 1969), 70.
- ⁴³ Amish Mennonite seminarians returning from Eastern Mennonite or Goshen offered their conference similar leadership. Though the Eastern Mennonite school was strongly premillennialist, their dean and influential Bible scholar, C. K. Lehman, was amillennialist. That friendship is noted in Bender, *Four Earthen Vessels*, 274.
- ⁴⁴ For a brief description and a discussion of the impact of these two documents, see Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 64-69.
- ⁴⁵ In the two decades after their 1947 name change, the United Missionary Church officially modified their position against noncombatant service before dropping nonresistance as an official doctrine. The “Articles of Faith and Practice” currently posted on the Evangelical Missionary Church website includes the statement: “Sincere Christians have conscientious differences as to their understanding of the teaching of the Word of God with reference to their responsibility as Christian citizens to human government both in times of war and times of peace. We are, therefore, to exercise tolerance and understanding, and respect the individual conscience with regard to participation in wars.”
- ⁴⁶ Sider, *The Brethren in Christ*, 239, 256. “And the wars brought Brethren in Christ closer to the Mennonites with whom they had religious and social ties... To cultivate these views and ties became a concern for Brethren in Christ leaders in the postwar period.” Brethren in Christ statements on peace (e.g. 1992) reflect their continuing interaction with other peace churches. Mennonite professor and preacher Ron Sider, from a core Canadian BIC family, stirred the 1984 Mennonite World Conference with his appeal for Christian peacemakers to be willing to take the same risks for peace that soldiers take in war. This was the inspiration for the 1986 formation of the activist Christian Peacemaker Teams.
- ⁴⁷ Longer informal linkages between Amish Mennonites and the larger (Old) Mennonite church were formalised when, in 1959, the Ontario Amish Mennonite Conference applied for membership in the Mennonite General Conference; “Amish” was dropped from their conference name in 1963.
- ⁴⁸ Leonard Gross, “The Doctrinal Era of the Mennonite Church,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 60 (1986), 101.