

The Influence of World War II on Mennonites in Canada

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On 4 September, 1939 I was not quite two years old. But I very distinctly remember an event which took place on that day. My father had gone to town, and came home with terrible news. I certainly did not then understand what had happened, but it was obvious that it was very bad. My mother was in the midst of kneading bread dough, but abandoned her work as both Dad and Mom knealt down to pray long and earnestly, while I amused myself by tracing small designs in the fine flour dust that had settled on the lid of mother's flour barrel. It was such a solemn, frightening and confusing experience that I have never been able to forget it.

The bad news on 4 September, 1939 was, of course, that war had broken out in Europe the previous day. My parents had experienced World War I, the revolution, and the ensuing civil war in Russia, before emigrating to Canada in 1926. War had destroyed their old homes and thrust the entire Russian Mennonite world into massive tragedy and destruction. And now war had broken out again. Would this new war alter our Canadian Mennonite world as tragically as World War I had altered their Russian Mennonite world?

Nearly 50 years have passed since that tragic day. We now know that World War II raged for almost six years. Fifty-seven nations became belligerents. More than 15,000,000 military personnel were killed or reported missing in action, and the civilian loss of life was certainly much greater. It is estimated that at least 40,000,000 human beings lost their lives as a direct result of the conflict that began on September 3, 1939.¹

World War II certainly changed the world as radically as had the Great War fought by the previous generation. But how did this terrible war affect and change the lives and conditions of Mennonites in Canada? The available secondary literature on this subject is still very limited and fragmentary. The impact of the war on Canadian Mennonite communities and on their way of life has not yet been defined or explained to the

point where we have a general consensus amongst scholars, or amongst the ordinary Mennonite people.

My purpose in this paper is to offer a possible general interpretation, some might call it a hypothesis or a general conceptual framework, designed to help us to understand better the Canadian Mennonite experience of the 1940s. The hypothesis is based on fairly extensive reading of the available secondary literature in both Canadian and Mennonite history, but it still has to be tested by extensive research in relevant primary sources.

My main hypothesis or theme of Canadian Mennonite history in the 1940s can be stated simply and succinctly. During the war Canadian Mennonites were overwhelmingly loyal to their adopted homeland and generally sought to co-operate with, and accommodate themselves to, the demands of the government, provided their basic beliefs and convictions were not violated. The Canadian government, for complex reasons of its own, also sought to deal with the Mennonites in co-operative and accommodative ways. Accommodation, in the sense of adapting, reconciling, adjusting and conforming, provided required concessions or conveniences are furnished by the host society,² marks the story of Canadian Mennonites in the 1940s.

Such accommodation did not take place without serious fears, misgivings, and considerable tensions within many Mennonite communities, but accommodation³ should be the unifying theme chosen for Volume III of *Mennonites in Canada*, much as Separation and Survival were the unifying themes of Volumes I and II respectively.⁴

This hypothesis regarding the Canadian Mennonite experience in the 1940s can be expanded to apply to the entire period from 1940 to 1960. The hesitant, uncertain and troubled accommodations made by Canadian Mennonites during the war years were greatly strengthened and confirmed in the prosperous 1950s when Canadian Mennonites reaped exceptionally rich economic, social, cultural, educational and artistic rewards from their co-operative and accommodative stance. The successes of the 1950s were often viewed as a sign of God's approval of the accommodation only reluctantly entered into in the 1940s. As a result, all the important barriers which had hitherto separated Canadian Mennonites from their fellow Canadians rapidly crumbled, and by 1960 Canadian Mennonites were no longer a separate people or a people engaged in a desperate struggle for survival. They had found new and important places in a Canadian society in which they felt reasonably comfortable and in which they prospered.⁵ They still adhered to many of the basic traditional teachings and beliefs of their forebears, even if their lifestyle, their social and cultural values, and, above all, their economic and educational activities made them an integral part of the larger Canadian community.

That is the basic hypothesis or interpretive theme proposed for the history of the Mennonites in Canada from 1940 to 1960. In order to test and explore the appropriateness and ramifications of this basic interpretation, a number of specific issues and themes need to be examined in much greater detail.

War has some direct and some indirect effects. The people most immediately and directly affected are those called upon to serve in the armed forces or, in the case of many Mennonites, in some form of alternative service. In that regard the situation in Canada was unique. In Canada, as elsewhere, memories of the Great War of 1914-1918 were still very much alive. As a result Canadian military and political leaders, and also Canadian Mennonites, faced the new military conflict without enthusiasm, but determined to avoid the most painful mistakes of the previous world conflict. They were marching resolutely forward facing backward.⁶

Canadian military and political leaders particularly remembered the enormous strains which Canadian manpower policies had created in the Great War. Historians tell us that "No single issue has divided Canadians so sharply as conscription for overseas service."⁷ The 1918 Easter riots in Quebec had very nearly plunged the country into civil war,⁸ and in the early months of World War II Prime Minister Mackenzie King was absolutely determined that there must not be another military manpower disaster. The resulting cautious manpower policies of the government, coupled with the Prime Minister's personal high regard for the Mennonite people he had gotten to know in his childhood home in Waterloo, Ontario, provided the right atmosphere for co-operation and accommodation between Mennonites and the Canadian government regarding military manpower policies which were, for Mennonites, the most difficult in wartime issues.⁹

The government was not alone in remembering and seeking to apply lessons from the past. Canadian Mennonites, whether they had experienced World War I in Canada or in Russia, remembered many things which fostered the formulation of a united and co-operative approach in Mennonite dealings with the government.¹⁰ It is interesting and instructive to note how each side later assessed the other on the critical issue of wartime service. The Mennonites wrote to the Prime Minister thus:

We, the undersigned, duly authorized representatives of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches in Canada, do hereby present a brief statement of our appreciation and gratitude to you and your Government for the kindly consideration you have shown to our participating groups.¹¹

Not to be outdone, the Chief Alternative Service Officer of Canada wrote that:

The Mennonites cooperated in every way from the beginning of Alternative Service. . . The bishops were always most willing to discuss mutual problems and to go as far as possible to cooperate within the limits of their conscience.¹²

This co-operative stance of the Mennonite leadership in their dealings with the government was shared by many Mennonite young men eligible for military or alternative service. The majority of these men opted for alternative service in activities ranging from medical and dental service in restricted military units to work in mental hospitals or in special forestry camps.¹³

A very substantial minority of Mennonite young men, however, volunteered for, or were conscripted into the Canadian armed forces under the terms of the National Resources Mobilization Act. There is still much dispute and a need for additional research to determine what proportion of military age Mennonite men actually enlisted. A search of Canadian military personnel files has produced a list of 4,453 names of Mennonites who joined the armed forces.¹⁴ Approximately 7,500 Mennonites entered alternative service,¹⁵ and many other young Mennonites were exempted from military service either as farmers or as teachers.¹⁶ More research into the number of exemptions granted to Mennonite young men, the reasons for those exemptions, and the attitudes of both the leaders and the young men regarding these exemptions is needed.¹⁷

The experiences of those Mennonite young men who served in the various Conscientious Objector camps, or in one of the other branches of Alternative Service, are the subject of several personal and collective reminiscences. The emotions and attitudes of those who obtained exemptions and therefore stayed at home are not as well documented. Even less is known about the reasons or the motivation of those who enlisted or of the influence they had on their peers and in their communities. Enlistment, in most cases, meant excommunication from the local church, but many of these men were later readmitted to membership.

The decisions young Mennonite males had to make when called to arms often shook and deeply affected their home communities, congregations and families. Those effects were accentuated when those in alternative service, or in active military service, returned. These men had experienced much that was new and foreign to their home communities. Very few could return home unchanged, and they changed their home communities if and when they returned.

Many of the inherited ideas and practices of Canadian Mennonites had been forged in countries where the civil authorities were hostile and alien. These ideas and practices had to be rethought and redefined in the midst of a war when both the leaders and the young men had to deal with a co-operative and sympathetic government. Neither the leaders who negotiated with the government, nor the young men who enlisted in the

armed forces or accepted assignments in alternative service could escape the need to rethink and redefine their attitudes toward, and convictions about, co-operation with government in a state of war.¹⁸

Brief reference should also be made here to another group of Mennonites who were very directly affected by, and who subsequently exerted very significant influence in Canadian Mennonite communities. These were the Mennonites who experienced the war in Europe (including Russia) but who came to Canada as refugees or displaced persons after the war. The military experiences of these people are peripheral to a study of Mennonites in Canada, but it is important to realize that these were, for the most part, uprooted people. Their links with and commitments to traditional rural and agricultural Mennonite values and lifestyles had been severely undermined long before they came to Canada. A new start was inevitable for them, and they shrewdly assessed the various opportunities offered in their new homeland, and opted overwhelmingly for advancement which required and facilitated co-operation with and integration into the larger Canadian society.

War, and particularly total war, was not only a male experience. Contemporary feminist historians tell us that World War II had a very significant liberating effect on Canadian women, some of whom enlisted in active military service, but many more took a great variety of wartime jobs. Paid employment gave these women a measure of freedom and independence many had not known before, and they were able to do work in areas that had formerly been exclusive male preserves. Their range of experiences was thus greatly increased, and fostered a new sense of confidence and competence which refuted many traditional sexual stereotypes.¹⁹

The available literature tells us very little about the effect of World War II on Canadian Mennonite women.²⁰ Some Mennonite women, for better or worse, had already gained some experience with paid employment during the very difficult times in the 1930s. Special Mennonite "Maedchenheime" were established in the larger cities where these girls found work, and there have been some studies of these homes,²¹ which have rather peculiar wartime parallels in Ottawa and in other centres where large numbers of unmarried women obtained work.²²

Employment needs or opportunities certainly brought a number of Mennonite women into the cities in the 1930s and 1940s. Since many were employed as domestic servants, they learned a good deal about various aspects of Canadian life. In Saskatoon, for example, several Mennonite young women worked as domestic servants in the residence of Walter Murray, the first President of the University of Saskatchewan. At least two of these young women helped to pay university tuition fees of brothers who were attending the university, and Murray's daughter told me the girls were often allowed to take home and give to their

impoverished brothers some left-over foods. The boys apparently developed a particular familiarity with left over hors d'oeuvres. One of those boys later became a university professor and the other a provincial cabinet minister and thus they also got their fair share of fresh hors d'oeuvres later. At least one of those girls remained a domestic servant for all of her working life.²³

There were probably other, more liberating, employment experiences for Canadian Mennonite women. What is perhaps more significant is the fact that these women were introduced to a very different world. It was a world which these women tended to regard as superior to their own impoverished rural homes.²⁴ Some were able to save enough money to take training as teachers, nurses, or other professionals, but school curricula of the day were specifically designed to promote assimilation, and health science practitioners also saw many things in the Mennonite communities that they believed needed to be changed and improved. The Mennonite women who took employment, and perhaps entered a profession, were certainly more likely to support Mennonite accommodation to, rather than separation from Canadian society.²⁵

Military experience, alternative service, or wartime employment exposed many Canadian Mennonites to the outside world which, while somewhat alien and frightening, proved to be relatively benign. Most Canadian Mennonites in the 1940s were, however, farmers, or worked in farm related businesses. Like other Canadian farmers, Mennonites had been subjected to very considerable instability and distress as a result of the economic vicissitudes of the 1920s and the catastrophic depression of the 1930s. They craved for stability and fair returns on their labours.

During the war both federal and provincial governments worked together to impose wide ranging and very effective agricultural marketing, wage and price controls.²⁶ These created a stable and reasonably profitable agricultural environment, while preventing wartime profiteering. The fact that the federal Food Controller was a former Mennonite from Saskatoon probably increased Mennonite confidence in the integrity of the system.²⁷ As a result the early and often strong opposition of some Canadian Mennonites to marketing agencies such as the co-operative and voluntary prairie wheat pools, gradually gave way to strong support for government sponsored marketing controls.²⁸ In this way the war ended critically important aspects of Mennonite agricultural separatism.

Wartime exigencies and demands also created very important new agricultural opportunities, particularly in the Fraser Valley and in the Niagara and Leamington area. Mennonites had begun to move into British Columbia in the late 1920s, but had encountered serious economic difficulties until wartime increased the demand for their produce.²⁹ The size and structure of the British Columbia market for agricultural pro-

duce, and how Mennonites served that market, needs a good deal of research. Geographers have done a good deal of work on the spatial dimensions of Mennonite settlements in British Columbia, but more work needs to be done on the economic aspects.³⁰ A matter of particular concern, and possible controversy, is the impact of the forced removal of the Japanese from British Columbia on local agricultural markets that had been served by the Japanese. Did this contribute to Mennonite prosperity in British Columbia? Did agricultural prosperity after the outbreak of the war, coupled with the virtually unrestricted access to other economic endeavours on this new frontier,³¹ facilitate a particularly rapid and enthusiastic, though somewhat unbalanced, Mennonite accommodation to that host society?

Agriculture in the Niagara Peninsula³² and in the Leamington area, was also very substantially affected by wartime demands and opportunities, although the changes were not quite as dramatic as in the Fraser Valley.³³ The history of A. J. Heinz, the corporate patron saint (or God-father) of Leamington tomato growers, clearly illustrates the crucial importance of the war in the development of a flourishing agricultural industry in that area.³⁴ The fact that Canada entered the war in September of 1939, but the United States remained neutral until 1941, ensured that many essential agricultural commodities were produced and processed in Canada whenever possible, and that gave a particular advantage to Ontario garden and vegetable farmers.³⁵

Mennonite agriculturalists in other parts of Canada did not do quite as well during the war,³⁶ but in general they had little reason to complain, and many reasons to praise God who provided the harvests and the governments which assured ready markets at reasonable and controlled prices.

Other sectors of the economy had traditionally been less relevant for Canadian Mennonites, but in the 1940s and 1950s there were also remarkable advances in a wide variety of Mennonite business ventures. Even before the war individual Dutch, Prussian, Russian, American and a few Canadian Mennonites had enjoyed very impressive successes in business. During and immediately after World War II, however, Canadian Mennonites registered very impressive gains in the business world. In part these successes are probably attributable to the opportunities which general wartime shortages present to talented individuals not in active military service. But it is also quite clear that direct military contracts rarely provided the stepping stones to Mennonite entrepreneurial success. Mennonite entrepreneurs only did well in some aspects of business, notably in housing construction, real estate, automobile sales, trucking, busing and agricultural supply and processing ventures. They remained conspicuously absent from other types of business, notably the arms industries, mining and processing of non-agricultural resources, most

forms of heavy industry, and chartered banking. Why were Canadian Mennonites drawn into some business activities, but not others? What factors contributed to Mennonite success or failure in business? It will be necessary to examine the history of some successful Mennonite business ventures to provide any reliable answers to these questions. There are, however, several factors that deserve particular attention.³⁷

The first important consideration for any aspiring businessman is the availability of investment capital. In many cases start up costs are relatively small, but adequate sources of capital are nevertheless important, and in the 1940s there were within the Mennonite community substantial pools of seriously underutilized capital. Mennonites, often for very good reason, had been suspicious of the larger Canadian financial institutions. They had instead tried to develop their own community based and church dominated financial institutions.³⁸ Before World War II several of the largest of these Mennonite financial institutions had made some outside investments which had proved disastrous.³⁹ This led to even greater caution and unadventurous financial investment policies. There was, however, a good deal of capital in Canadian Mennonite communities, as the success of government victory loan selling campaigns soon demonstrated. Much of this available capital could be, and was, tapped by Mennonite entrepreneurs. The terms and conditions on which such capital was obtained, moreover, provided an unusual measure of understanding and flexibility in repayment schedules if the company was faced with unexpected short term difficulties. Mennonite lenders seemed less inclined to put a fundamentally sound Mennonite owned company with short term cash flow problems into receivership, than was the case with other creditors.⁴⁰ This was critically important to many developing Mennonite companies.

A second critical factor in the development of Mennonite businesses relates to the availability of an adequate and reliable source of labour. Mennonite businessmen naturally looked first to family, friends and co-religionists who in turn preferred to take employment with people of their own faith and background. Canadian manpower policies certainly did not force all employable Mennonites into military or alternative service. As a result, Mennonite businessmen enjoyed some advantages in obtaining an adequate supply of reliable workers.

Mennonite workers were in some respects unusually good employees. Class consciousness and conflict had not developed in the rural Mennonite communities to the extent that it had in Canadian society generally. Mennonite employers utilizing Mennonite workers could appeal to the loyalty and good will of their employees to work harder and to forego competitive wages, benefits and working conditions in order to help build and ensure the survival of the company. The fact that many Mennonite employers often worked together with, and suffered the same

sacrifices as their employees in difficult times, further enhanced harmonious relations.⁴¹ The actions of the Wartime Price and Trade Board in freezing or at least regulating wages, terms and conditions of work, and prices, further helped to reduce employer-employee conflicts.⁴² It was not, in fact, until the 1950s, that the familial relations between Mennonite employers and employees began to come under some strain, and even then only if some venture had been highly successful but the benefits were shared disproportionately between employers and employees. Many Mennonite employers, however, have been able to retain a strong sense of a working partnership between employers and employees.⁴³ Competent management and a reliable and reasonably satisfied workforce is essential in any successful business venture.

A third important factor for many wartime Mennonite enterprises concerned markets. Wartime markets were generally strong, though carefully regulated. In most sectors of the economy there was, however, also a substantial measure of competition. Mennonite businessmen often gained at least a slight advantage in that competition by the simple fact that the majority of their co-religionists, if given a choice, preferred to buy from one of their own. A stalwart reputation of Mennonite honesty and integrity also attracted others. I do not know of any statistical proof which demonstrates that Mennonite horse traders or used car dealers were more honest or more scrupulous in their business dealings than were their non-Mennonite competitors. Nevertheless, traditional Mennonite values of honesty, integrity, thrift and hard work were widely acknowledged, and many southern Manitoba and British Columbia Mennonites thought they could get honest value at the growing number of Mennonite dealerships, especially if they could use the vernacular Low German language when haggling about a deal. Mennonites felt more comfortable and more secure if they could deal with one of their own, and that was important in the early success of many nascent Mennonite business ventures.

Mennonite entrepreneurship was very substantially augmented and changed by the large number of post war Mennonite refugees who came to Canada. Most of these very quickly discharged whatever obligations they had incurred in the immigration process, and then moved into nearby urban centers and into several lucrative economic ventures and opportunities which they found in the cities. These were, as already indicated, uprooted peoples. They had to start with little or nothing, and quickly realized that the most attractive opportunities were no longer on the land or in agriculture, but in urban businesses. Some, with little or no capital, found particularly attractive opportunities in the urban housing market. They could move into decrepit facilities and, in lieu of all or a portion of their rental payments, invest their labour in the improvement of those facilities. Others were able to acquire a city lot, or an old and run

down house and repair that. The improved properties could then be sold, and the capital thus obtained could be invested in new lots or old houses into which these ambitious and industrious immigrants could pour enormous quantities of "sweat equity." Like many other immigrants coming from very difficult situations, they were willing to work harder and to endure greater privations, than many of their fellow citizens, thus gaining the surplus capital that could be reinvested as they built up their urban businesses.

Housing and real estate ventures were only some of the numerous business opportunities open to both immigrant and long time residents, and in the 1940s Canadian Mennonites in increasing numbers availed themselves of those opportunities to expand existing businesses or to start new ones. For purposes of this history, the main concern must be the assessment of how the growing Mennonite involvement in business influenced and affected the larger Mennonite community. It is well known that some businessmen coming from a Mennonite background dropped or transferred their religious affiliation to other denominations. Others stayed and sometimes used their money and influence to move congregations and conferences in particular directions. While these influences are obviously diverse, they tend to have some common features. Increased involvement in business tended to break down old separatist sentiments and to foster accommodation with the rest of Canadian society. The old rural Mennonite isolation of earlier generations simply did not foster aggressive business ventures, and was discarded when more and more Mennonites became involved in growing and prosperous businesses.

Business, however, was not the only attraction that drew Canadians in increasing numbers from their traditional rural and agricultural communities into the cities. Wartime experiences broadened not only economic, but also intellectual horizons, and after the war many Canadian Mennonites looked to further education as a means to build on their wartime experiences and to take advantage of new educational, professional, economic and social opportunities. New ideas, new experiences and new questions, whether in active military service, or in alternative service, or in new economic and social activities, or as a result of radical displacements in Europe, all fostered a desire for more knowledge and understanding and, hopefully, greater opportunities to help make the post war world a better place. Education was widely regarded as one of the best ways to accomplish this.⁴⁴

Mennonite education in the 1940s developed essentially along three parallel and at times conflicting lines. There was, first of all, a line of educational development that can best be described as traditional and conservative. Its objective was to train children for a future within traditional rural and agricultural communities. Only those things, and only as

much of those things, as would prove of use and value for adult villagers in rural communities, were to be taught. That certainly could include training for those who might later become teachers, doctors or other professionals in the rural villages, but the underlying objective remained rural and agricultural in this first stream of Mennonite education. For most children grade 8 was deemed sufficient.

At the opposite extreme there was an educational stream which stressed advanced secular education which would equip Mennonite young people to live and function in the modern, usually urban, world. Those Mennonite men who enlisted in the armed forces could obtain modest government allowances after the war to complete their high school education and go to university. This opened doors that had hitherto been tightly closed to most young Mennonites. It would still take nearly a decade before university training became a practical choice for most academically qualified Mennonites, but an important Canadian beginning was made in the 1940s. Advanced educational opportunities, however, brought students into closer contact with the outside world and prepared them for work in that outside world. The majority of graduates of universities or other advanced educational institutions would not return to an isolated rural and agricultural way of life.

The third major strand in Canadian Mennonite education was, in many ways, a compromise between the two strands already identified. That third strand is best exemplified by the creation in the late 1940s of two new Mennonite Bible Colleges in Winnipeg, and to a lesser extent by the new Mennonite high schools that were established immediately after the war.⁴⁵

The Winnipeg Bible Colleges and Mennonite high schools in all Canadian provinces west of Quebec were in some ways a natural extension of work that had previously been done by the various and scattered Bible Schools. The colleges would continue the training of future Sunday School teachers, choir directors, missionaries and preachers. Many of these church workers would continue to earn their living as farmers or teachers, but be better equipped for effective lay leadership in their home congregations.

The new Mennonite institutions of higher learning were, however, also something quite new and different. They provided much stronger links to the secular universities and to higher learning generally. It was intended from the beginning that the Bible Colleges be academically respectable — something that certainly could not be said for many of the Bible schools. And these colleges and high schools, like the secular institutions of higher learning, were to prepare their students for careers and professions that would inevitably take most of them out of their rural communities and congregations. Those that did return as well trained church workers were apt to bring a variety of new ideas and influences,

ultimately altering radically the traditional Mennonite leadership and authority patterns. Higher education was the key to advancement and success both inside and outside the churches, and that education was very obviously and deliberately designed to fit Canadian secular educational patterns. But while fitting those secular models the Mennonite institutions were also expected to provide unique pastoral training and theological leadership.⁴⁶

Rapid social, economic, political and cultural changes inevitably have major theological repercussions. North American Fundamentalist movements have been attributed to the growing tensions and apprehensions arising out of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the United States.⁴⁷ In the 1920s the debates over North American fundamentalism has seriously shaken the Swiss Mennonite Churches in Ontario.⁴⁸ The very rapid changes that swept many Mennonite communities in the 1940s and 1950s also created very intense theological debates.

Those far sighted leaders involved in the establishment of the Bible Colleges in Winnipeg and of improved and consolidated college and seminary training at Goshen-Elkhart recognized that Mennonites urgently needed more and better theological training. Otherwise unwelcome outside winds of doctrine might sweep some churches and conferences. The times were changing, and it required great wisdom and theological insight to determine which of the old ways must be protected and safeguarded and which could be abandoned. There are, despite much diversity, very important common traits in the theology of various Mennonite groups. The identification of those common traits could produce greater unity, and it might equip Mennonites to deal with rapid change without losing the core or essence of their faith and Christian life.

Any discussion of Mennonite theology would be seriously incomplete if one looked only at the ideas, insights and writings of the various leaders and educators. For all religious groups, but particularly for Mennonites who make much of their belief in a "priesthood of all believers" the insights, experiences and convictions of the common people, the ordinary church members, are of critical importance. There is no doubt whatever that the influence of the brotherhoods was of immense importance in the practical application or implementation of theological teachings, and often led to important reassessments and changes in official theological positions taken at conferences or in the academic institutions. There was, in fact, often a substantial measure of suspicion between the uneducated membership and its educated leadership, and if the theology of the leaders did not fit into the practical realities of everyday life, it was generally the official theology, rather than the practices of everyday life, that were adjusted. This trend is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the collection of official Mennonite statements on peace and social concerns. The index to the collection of more than 5,000 official

Mennonite pronouncements is entitled *Where We Stand*.⁴⁹ It would be far more appropriate, at least if one looks at the details of these official statements as they affect the everyday life of the members of Mennonite Churches in Canada, if that collection of documents were entitled *Where We Stood*.

This raises some interesting and complex questions. What was the role of theology and theological leadership in these very important changes in Canadian Mennonite communities in the 1940s and 1950s. Did our leaders and theologians provide guidance and direction in times of very rapid change? Or did they merely provide explanations and justifications of things and activities the people had clearly decided to do? The answers to such questions are not easy to find. We undoubtedly need much more research, but it seems clear that theological leadership was essential in a redefinition, or perhaps more accurately, a restatement and reformulation of old beliefs and ideals. Perhaps pushed or forced by the course of events, Mennonite leaders had to ask themselves in a new and serious way, what the core of Mennonite and Christian beliefs and ideals really was. Could these be safeguarded, and perhaps even enriched, if some of the old separatist external forms that had become restricting and uncomfortable were discarded? Perhaps for the particular Mennonite community in which I grew up nothing quite captured the spirit of the new search for basic values more clearly than Delbert Wiens' influential discussion paper entitled "New Wineskins for Old Wine."⁵⁰ The title of that paper was absolutely inspired. It had obvious scriptural antecedents, and I have no doubt that many who never read or understood the scholarly arguments and analysis of that paper, understood very well the relevance of the title to their local situation. It spoke to the need to redefine and reclothe in far more diverse cultural garb the essential and central values, beliefs and convictions drawn from a long and highly diverse Anabaptist theological tradition, but it also permitted the kind of accommodation to Canadian society mentioned in other parts of this paper.

World War II radically altered the world in which Canadian Mennonites lived. Canada, unlike host societies elsewhere, seemed generally friendly and benign to Canadian Mennonites and their ideals. Loyalties ran deep in the hearts of Canadian Mennonites and during the war they adopted a generally co-operative stance toward the Canadian government and Canadian society. It would, however, be a serious mistake to conclude that Canadian Mennonites moved smoothly and peacefully from a separatist rural and agrarian way of life to a more accommodative Canadian lifestyle. There was certainly a great deal of concern and opposition. A substantial minority, drawing support from the Amish and the more conservative orders among both the Swiss and Russian Mennonites were absolutely determined to safeguard and enforce traditional

Mennonite theological, social and cultural practices. But that required deliberate social or geographical separation and isolation which usually took one of three forms. The older and well established conservative orders in Ontario insisted on a social and technological form of separatism that is most closely identified with the horses and buggies of the Ontario Old Order and Amish Mennonites, but which in fact had a variety of separatist social, cultural and technological manifestations. In western Canada the most traditional and conservative Mennonites sought escape and a new physical isolation, either on some remote northern Canadian frontier or through emigration to Latin America.

There was also fierce resistance in many other Mennonite congregations, and a long list can be provided of Canadian Mennonite leaders who thundered and condemned perceived transgressors like Moses of old when he descended Mount Sinai to find his people worshipping the Golden Calf. But most of these would-be Mennonite Moses were replaced, quietly if possible or with much noise and fury if necessary, by more compliant and comfortable leaders. Yet, in retrospect, it is clear that many of the evils against which these unsuccessful leaders warned their people have wrought havoc and heartaches in the church and family lives of those who accommodated themselves to the norms of Canadian society.

There are also many Canadian Mennonites who experienced life in the 1940s and 1950s who certainly did not find the host Canadian society particularly accommodating. Many young Mennonites were hassled mercilessly by military review boards, teachers had their certificates withdrawn, and farmers and businessmen experienced discrimination and harsh treatment repeatedly. My own first public school teacher had a husband serving in the armed forces, and did not take very kindly to a little kid that spoke only German and whose parents were pacifists. These minor and major tensions between Canadian Mennonites and their fellow citizens must be taken into account, but they do not, I think, invalidate the underlying theme of accommodation. A nation and a people in a state of war are rarely, if ever, sympathetic to a minority which refuses to take up arms and which does not share in the heaviest burdens of the conflict. If one considers the wartime treatment meted out to Canadian Mennonites with the experiences of non-conformist minority groups anywhere else in the world, the Canadian experience is certainly unique and remarkable. Even a comparison of Canadian Mennonite experiences in World War II with those in World War I shows remarkable differences. There were certainly still difficulties and conflicts, but these were far less serious than in other countries. Canadian Mennonite leaders and many of their followers knew that, were grateful for it, and sought to meet their fellow Canadians in a co-operative and accommodating way.

In looking back on the Canadian Mennonite experiences of the 1940s

it is easy to see that, despite some notable exceptions, Canadian Mennonites generally ceased to be, or even aspired to be, a separate people. As in all periods of rapid social change, they did not all move at the same pace, or even in the same direction at all times. There were very high attrition rates, particularly among those who entered active military service. But as an ethnic and religious group Canadian Mennonites came out of the war with both the will and the means to redefine and refocus their distinctive beliefs in a manner which would permit greater accommodation but not complete assimilation into Canadian society.

It was perhaps fortuitous that in the 1940s these basic reorientations could still be worked out in non-urban areas and in small Mennonite enclaves within a few cities. Canadian Mennonites generally did not become urbanized in the 1940s, but the developments of the 1940s positioned them particularly well to move into the cities in the 1950s. This happened to such an extent that by 1960 Canadian Mennonites and particularly the Mennonite Brethren had ceased to be a predominantly rural people. The true character and role of Canadian Mennonites in urban settings, however, had not yet been defined. That would only happen in the 1950s which is the subject of next year's conference.

Notes

¹These statistics are taken from the conclusion of the article on World War II, published in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1961, Vol. 23, p. 793.

²This description of accommodation is based on the definition of the word accommodation, as given in *The Consolidated-Webster Comprehensive Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Webster's: Chicago, 1953), p. 6.

³I have looked at, and given serious consideration to several key words or concepts that might describe the essential aspects of Canadian Mennonite experiences in the 1940s and 1950s. Assimilation is too harsh and too absolute a term, and has been given sociological connotations that do not accurately describe the Canadian Mennonite experience. Culture and acculturation have to do with agricultural tillage and cultivation or with the training and discipline by which man's moral and intellectual nature is elevated. None of these alternative terms seem to me to be as appropriate in describing the Canadian Mennonite experience as is the term accommodation, as already defined.

⁴Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920. The History of a Separate People*, Toronto: Macmillan, 1974; and Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940. A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982).

⁵Some of these conclusions are based on analyses of the 1961 Census of Canada returns, particularly Bulletin SP-3 which provides detailed statistics on Religious Denominations, Counties and Subdivisions.

⁶Paraphrased from Ian Macpherson and John Herd Thompson, "An Orderly Reconstruction: Prairie Agriculture in World War Two," in D. H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. 4 (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1984), p. 21-34.

⁷J. L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises. A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), as quoted on the back cover of the paperback edition.

⁸Elizabeth Armstrong, *The Crisis of Quebec, 1914-1918* (New York, 1937).

⁹A detailed and carefully documented account of the Canadian government's military manpower policies is available in R. MacGregor Dawson, *The Conscription Crisis of 1944* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).

¹⁰See particularly Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920. The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974).

¹¹Letter from E. J. Swalm, J. B. Martin and Elven Shantz to Mackenzie King, 25 September 1945, as quoted in J. A. Toews, *Alternative Service in Canada during World War II* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1959), p. 39.

¹²J. F. MacKinnon, Chief Alternative Service Officer, as quoted in J. A. Toews, *Ibid.*, p. III.

¹³Lawrence Klippenstein, ed., *Just When We Were* (Winnipeg: History/Archives Committee of the conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1978).

¹⁴This list was prepared under the direction of Frank H. Epp for the *Mennonites in Canada* project. The complete list is available in the Conrad Grebel College archives.

¹⁵J. A. Toews, *Alternative Service in Canada during World War II*, Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1959.

¹⁶E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Altona, Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), p. 239.

¹⁷The 1941 Census of Canada reports a total of III,278 Mennonites.

¹⁸Albert Keim, "Service of Resistance? The Mennonite Response to Conscription in World War II," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (April 1978), p. 141-155.

¹⁹Susan Mann Trofiemenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Minority* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972). See also *The Female Worker in Canada* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1968).

²⁰It is, I think, indicative of the paucity of information available on this subject that Esther Epp-Thiessen, who is certainly aware of women's issues in history, made scarcely any references to women in her chapter on the war years in *Altona. The Story of a Prairie Town* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1982). More research is obviously needed in this important area.

²¹There are frequent and detailed reports on these homes in *Der Bote*. Details studies of the Saskatoon home are provided in Esther Paetkau, "The Ministry of J. J. Thiessen in Saskatoon," M. Div. Thesis: Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon; and in Esther Paetkau, *First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, 1923-1982*, Saskatoon, 1982.

²²The Laurentian Terrace, a very large rambling two storey wooden structure on Sussex Drive in Ottawa is the best known example of the quarters provided by the government for unmarried girls working in wartime Ottawa. That facility continued in operation until the mid 1960s.

²³Jean Murray, daughter of University President Walter Murray, discussed her experiences with, and recollections of, Mennonite domestic servants on a number of occasions with me.

²⁴One of my aunts also served as a domestic servant, but in a rural setting. Her written recollections give expression to feelings of both awe and frustration over the situation in which she found herself. A copy of these reminiscences is in my possession.

²⁵David Rempel, "Der Zug in die Stadt. Die groesste Wanderung in unserer Geschichte," *Der Bote*, Vol. 38, (May 23, 1961), p. 7, 30.

²⁶The best general work on this subject is G. E. Britnell and V. C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace, 1935-50* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960).

²⁷This man changed his name from Schellenberg to Shelly, and not only left the Mennonite church but also ordered all his employees to cease their attendance of services at First Mennonite Church. The affair created a good deal of tension locally, but the policies of the Food Controller, as distinct from his church politics, were popular. For the local situation see Esther Paetkau, "The Ministry of J. J. Thiessen in Saskatoon," M. Div. Thesis, Lutheran Theological Seminary, University of Saskatchewan, 1979.

²⁸W. M. Drummond, "The Role of Agricultural Marketing Boards," in J. J. Deutsch, B. S. Kierstad, K. Levitt and R. M. Will, eds., *The Canadian Economy: Selected Readings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965). It is very interesting to note how many times the Swiss Mennonites went on record opposing membership in the prairie wheat pools, but how few references there are to participation in the various Ontario marketing boards of the 1930s. See Bert Friesen, ed., *Where We Stand. An Index to Statements by Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada, 1878-1982* (Winnipeg: M.C.C. Canada, 1986).

²⁹For a good general summary of the early history of Mennonite settlements in British

Columbia, the Leamington and Niagara areas, see Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940. A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982).

³⁰Alfred H. Siemens, "Mennonites in the Fraser Valley," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 15, (1960), p. 102-107. John Jacob Krahn, "A History of the Mennonites in British Columbia," M. A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1955.

³¹A partial listing of Mennonite economic diversification in British Columbia is given in G. G. Baerg, *A Brief History of Mennonites in British Columbia*, prepared for the Centennial Publication, 1867-1967, "Histories of Ethnic Groups in British Columbia," by the Secretary of the Mennonite Central Committee, British Columbia.

³²Ellen Barr, "Patterns of Selective Accentuation Among Niagara Mennonites," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (1983), p. 77-91. Gerhard N. Harder, "Fruit Growing in the Niagara Peninsula," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 11, (1956), p. 75-79.

³³Ellen Barr, "Patterns of Selective Accentuation Among Niagara Mennonites," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1983), p. 77-91.

³⁴Henry Paetkau, "A Struggle for Survival: The Russian Mennonite Immigrants in Ontario, 1924-1939," M. A. Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1977.

³⁵G. E. Britnell and V. C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace, 1935-1960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960).

³⁶H. G. L. Strange, "The Wheat Industry of the Canadian West. Its Past, Present and Probable Future," *Canadian Banker*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (1941). Ian MacPherson and John H. Thompson, "An Orderly Reconstruction: Prairie Agriculture in World War II," in D. H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. 4 (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1984), p. 21-34.

³⁷In my opinion the case study method and the theory of the firm, as developed by historians at the Harvard Business School, and the Canadian interpretive work of Michael Bliss are particularly helpful in a study of Canadian Mennonite entrepreneurship. See particularly Michael Bliss, *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).

³⁸Jacob Peters, "The Sommerfelder Waisenamt: Origins, Development and Dissolution," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Dec. 1980), p. 8-14.

³⁹These failures are discussed in some detail in Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940. A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982).

⁴⁰That, at any rate, was certainly the case with the Coaldale Mennonite Credit Union, whose affairs I have examined in some detail. See T. D. Regehr, "Mennonite Change: The Rise and Decline of Mennonite Community Organizations at Coaldale, Alberta," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 32, No. 4, (Dec. 1977), p. 13-22.

⁴¹J. T. Coop, ed., *Industrial Unionism in Kitchener, 1937-1947* (Elora: Commuck Press, 1976).

⁴²Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System During World War Two," *Labour/Le Travail*, 1978.

⁴³The firm of D. W. Friesen & Sons of Altona, Manitoba, would appear to be exemplary in this regard. See Esther Epp-Thiessen, *Altona. The Story of a Prairie Town* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1982).

⁴⁴See for example the special issue of *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (April 1965), which is devoted entirely to issues dealing with Mennonite university students.

⁴⁵John George Doerksen, *History, Philosophy and Development of Mennonite Brethren Bible College*, Ed. D. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1968.

⁴⁶For a rather clear expression this view see Rudy Wiebe, "The Builders of Our School. A Brief History of the A.M.H.S.," in *Quo Vadis, Yearbook of the Alberta Mennonite High School*, 1956, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁷Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Origins of Fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).

⁴⁸Paul Toews, "Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges: A Response to Cultural Transitions?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. 57, No. 3, (July 1983), p. 241-256.

⁴⁹Bert Friesen, ed., *Where We Stand*.

⁵⁰This paper was printed separately and widely distributed. It was also published in *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (April 1966), p. 51-56.