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# Review Article

## “All that glisters . . . ”: Delbert Plett and the Place of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russian–Mennonite History

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As in many other things, the ancient Greeks possessed particular views of the past. One version outlined a steady debasement of life; the golden age, and the subsequent silver age, had passed and the feats of the gods and heroes would never be seen again. From Mennonites, however, come more prosaic visions. In recent times for some Mennonites the golden years belong to a period immediately prior to the outbreak of the first world war: a time of hot summer days, of work and play under an azure sky, of fields of golden wheat pregnant with the promise of a bountiful harvest upon which peace and prosperity depended: a vision of social and economic success, truly, a *Zeit erfüllt*. But now we are presented with a new view in which the golden years lie in the first half of the nineteenth century. The sense of fulfillment is not one of earthly rewards, but of religious steadfastness, and the heroes are not those who encouraged economic success or who founded progressive institutions, but the elders, ministers and members of a minority group, the Kleine Gemeinde (from now on the KG).

Delbert Plett's new book, *The Golden Years*,<sup>1</sup> is the second of an intended four volume history of the KG of which one volume, *History and Events*, dealing with the period 1866–76, has already appeared.<sup>2</sup> This

new volume, however, is much longer than the first and Plett has provided a detailed commentary on, and interpretation of, the extremely interesting contemporary documents he has discovered. These documents were preserved by earlier KG leaders, most notably by Elder Peter P. Toews, and Plett has also collected other material from descendants of KG members, mainly in Canada. The latest volume ranges widely from early church history, through Anabaptism to settlement in Russia in the early nineteenth century. The core of the book though consists of a study of the foundation and development of the KG in Molochnaya until about 1850.

My aim in this article is to examine Plett's interpretation of events in Russia, to assess the significance of the new documents and to present some alternative interpretations of the period and the significance of the KG in any understanding of nineteenth century Mennonite life.

*Klaas Reimer and the separation of the KG: just a matter of principles?* Plett bases most of his account of the life of Klass Reimer and the separation of the KG on Reimer's autobiography, parts of which (or at least parts of a version) were quoted by P. M. Friesen in 1911.<sup>3</sup> Plett, however, provides a full text and this increases our understanding of the period. The autobiography though cannot be considered as an impartial or an accurate historical record of events. Reimer wrote his account long after many of the events had occurred, for the edification of his followers and their descendants and without quoting any contemporary documents. The account must therefore be used with great caution; unfortunately we have few other accounts of this period or of the events he discusses, but what we do know about the period and the people involved throws into question some of Plett's interpretations.

First, there is the problem of Reimer's Prussian background; after all he was over thirty when he migrated to Russia and many of his ideas and opinions must have already formed in Prussia. Unfortunately we still know so little about Prussian Mennonite society and culture in the eighteenth century. It was largely a complex agrarian society but with important urban influences, especially in Danzig, with considerable regional variation; it was economically diverse with differences in world-view based on congregational affiliation and rural isolation. Plett argues that Reimer's early life was influenced by the more worldly appeals of the city of Danzig where a struggle developed in the late eighteenth century between rural and urban sections of the community. Following Reimer's own account (152) he calls this a struggle between the "Grosze" congregation in the city and the "Kleine" congregation of the rural area (150). This division is made to presage the schism which later was to emerge in Russia. Carl Bangs, however, has argued (correctly I think) that no "proto-KG-congregation" existed in Prussia prior to emigration; Reimer's view is an indulgence of hindsight.

On the other hand, it would be nice to know a great deal more than is currently available about the ideas and concerns in Prussia which were to become a matter of controversy in Russia. While the exact circumstances for the emergence of the KG must be sought in the conditions of early settlement in Russia, many of the principles involved were of long standing concern in Mennonite communities.<sup>6</sup>

What were these circumstances of settlement? Plett attempts to provide some detail, for instance he discusses the socio-economic conditions of settlement and the families involved in the formation of the KG (156). He argues that the Molochnaia settlers were "relatively equal in wealth" in spite of glaring evidence to the contrary. Since the publication of Pisarevsky's account of the Molochnaia migration it has been clear that there were considerable differences in wealth among the migrants.<sup>7</sup> A recent Soviet study based on official records, in spite of its Marxist rhetoric, confirms this, indicating that one third of the settlers owned almost 90% of the declared wealth.<sup>8</sup> Many of the KG obviously came from the more prosperous sections of the population, including Reimer himself. He was, on his own admission (164), one of a group of wealthy Mennonites who secretly negotiated the purchase of a vast estate from a Russian private landowner for a million roubles. These plans were in fact discovered by the Russian authorities who ordered the Mennonites to settle on the government land provided at Molochnaia.<sup>9</sup>

The settlement in Molochnaia was a period of great strain and adjustment for all Mennonites and Reimer's account provides ample evidence of the considerable conflict which occurred. Unlike later Mennonite group-settlements in Canada in the 1870's, the migration to New Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century brought together Mennonites from extremely varied backgrounds. Groups speaking different dialects, with distinctive customs and various occupations, from different areas, belonging to separate congregations and family groups and possessing unequal access to money and material resources, were suddenly forced to co-operate in a hostile, treeless land far away from the friends and relations in Prussia. They had come to Russia for a variety of reasons, often poorly articulated and sometimes extremely idealistic: some desired economic security, others social advancement, and a few the preservation of religious ideals. In Molochnaia they were forced to establish a new community and congregation not from the scattered homesteads and congregations they had known in Prussia, but in close-knit villages where everyone's private business was open to public scrutiny and previously 'independent' farmers were subject to community regulation. The potential for conflict was immense and for the leadership, civil and religious, controlling such a crowd of pugnacious immigrants, must have been a thankless task.

But the struggle for leadership in the congregation and the commu-

nity was also a source of tension. The major areas of conflict involved authority and social control. The system of self-government set up by the Russian authorities at the village and colony level, using Mennonites, soon clashed with the structure of religious authority in the newly established Flemish congregation. This struggle over spheres of influence and the exercise of authority continued in one form or another for the next fifty years. The first district mayor, Claas Wiens, was obviously a competent administrator but, as Reimer shows, soon was involved in bitter disputes with members of the ministry. Plett seems quite willing to accept Reimer's account of events and that in the arguments between Wiens and Elder Jacob Enns, the latter was merely pursuing personal grievances (164, 165, 167-9). But the issues involved were undoubtedly more complex and of concern to many in the colony. Plett claims that Wiens inflicted a humiliating defeat on Enns (169), but Enns succeeded in forcing Wiens from office after only two years.<sup>10</sup> There were also tensions within the ranks of the ministry.

Reimer was a person of some standing in the community from the start of settlement. Married to the daughter of one of the leading elders in Prussia, the late Peter Epp, he had come to Russia with Epp's elder brother, Cornelius, a minister in Danzig since 1766.<sup>11</sup> Reimer's brothers-in-law had been ministers in Khortitsa and one was still alive at the time of his migration. Reimer was thus part of the closely-knit group of people, united by ties of kinship and marriage, who dominated religious life in Prussia and similar structures of leadership had been transferred and re-established in Russia.<sup>12</sup> Seniority within this system was based on the date of ordination as much as the age of the minister; Cornelius Epp for instance was the senior ordained minister at the time of his migration to Russia although he was too old and feeble to influence events. Reimer, however, was the only minister in Molochnaya to have been ordained in Prussia and thus possessed seniority in terms of ordination. The first three ministers selected in Khortitsa in 1804 to serve the Molochnaya colonists were in fact ordained by Reimer.<sup>13</sup> But in the election to choose an elder, one of these new ministers, Jakob Enns, gained more votes than Reimer. In my thesis I suggested that Reimer felt he would have been a better choice.<sup>14</sup> As Al Reimer has recently pointed out I provide no evidence for such a suggestion and this is true.<sup>15</sup> But given his seniority and experience and later events it is not an unreasonable suggestion. Even if Reimer himself had never entertained such ideas, it is clear that others later thought he would make a better leader.<sup>16</sup>

The new ministry had been built from scratch, although it is unclear whether any of the ministers selected came from the established families who supplied congregational leadership in Prussia.<sup>17</sup> Reimer was not the only minister to experience trouble with the elder and every minister must have been subject to pressures from kin or people from their local

areas in Prussia who wanted special treatment. Enns himself was undoubtedly a difficult character, as other accounts indicate, but I do not think he entirely deserves the comments of reprobation afforded to him by Plett who relies almost entirely on Reimer's description.<sup>18</sup> It would not have been easy to mould a new congregation and Enns held office through a difficult period.

Thus although we know the issues of *principle* involved in Reimer's separation from Enns and most of the congregation, we know little about other issues. The matters of principle are well known: the use of physical force, the "contributions" to the Russian war effort, the infringements of discipline and a host of minor complaints (smoking, involvement in weddings, etc.). But what about the politics of authority and control among the ministers?<sup>19</sup> What about the emergence of factions among the colonists? Reimer's first wife died in 1806 and he married again; his contacts with the Epp family were weakened but he established new links by marrying into the von Riesen (Friesen) family from where a large number of future members of the KG were to come. The patriarch of this family, Abraham von Riesen who settled in Ohrloff (155) Bangs has identified as an important source of many of the ideas central to the KG.<sup>20</sup> So not only ministerial politics but also the politics of kinship and marriage need to be considered in the formation of the KG.

Seen from another perspective Reimer's refusal to recognize the authority of his elder precipitated the crisis and resulted in his expulsion from the congregation. It is not really surprising that the Khortitsa Flemish elder refused to ordain Reimer as leader of a new group (172-3). When Khortitsa had been founded it was hoped that a single, united congregation would be established but the presence of a Frisian minority resulted in two congregations.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of Molochnaya renewed hopes for a united congregation and Reimer's separation threatened that hope not by continuing the old Frisian/Flemish division but by renewing the disruptive practice of congregational schism which had prevailed in Prussia. Even the Frisians, sympathetic to the independence of other congregations, would not fully recognize the new group.

Whatever the exact circumstances of the formation of the KG, Plett is not justified in his caricature of those who remained in the large Flemish congregation. He claims an inept and spiritless leadership controlled a community of "cultural Mennonites" committed to a hollow orthodoxy (7, 178, 307 etc.).<sup>22</sup> It is not so easy to draw a sharp line to demarcate the views and practices of conservative Mennonites at this or at later periods in Mennonite history (see my comments below). In time the KG did become increasingly distinctive in their ideas and practices in Molochnaya, but this was only after a long period of change within the KG and more importantly in the larger Mennonite community.

### Was pietism the enemy within?

According to Plett the major challenge the KG had to face in Russia came not from the culturally orthodox Mennonites (although they continued to "persecute" the KG),<sup>23</sup> but from culturally progressive groups, infected with an alien virus — pietism. The adoption of pietism was a disaster for Mennonite life because it led many to abandon the true Anabaptist–Mennonite faith. Pietism was part of an "invasion" of foreign ideas imposed upon the Mennonites (174). Plett seems to ascribe pietism with a greater coherence and strength than I think is warranted. He also attributes to it ideas, practices and forms which are false. For instance he speaks of pietism as "a movement" (7) as if it were part of a general conspiracy, and claims that "radical pietism" (apparently a "sub-species" which is loosely defined) was "narrow minded" and "judgemental" (290), that its followers burnt people at the stake (176), and that they indulged in outbursts of excommunication (190, 260). Finally he seems convinced that pietism was dominated by millennial ideas (339) in the Mennonite experience through the teachings of Jung–Stilling and the Württemberg theologian, Bengel, (314). Jung Stilling's writings were a "great influence" (67) and were to be found in almost "every home" (323) of the Russian Mennonites. Plett does recognise another form of "mild pietism," but this appears to be mainly confined to the thought of Johann Cornies (7, 290, 307), about which more will be said below.

Quite frankly from my own reading of the sources concerning the very diverse manifestations of pietism that existed in European societies between the seventeenth and nineteenth century, I cannot recognize much in Plett's account. His description of how pietism became part of Mennonite thought in Russia is also difficult to support.

It is extremely difficult to generalize about the nature of pietism and to apply such generalizations to particular historical manifestations of pietism. Pietism was undoubtedly an important influence, directly and indirectly, on a number of established religious communities, including Mennonites, and its language and ideals were incorporated into other aspects of cultural life and literature, particularly in Germany. Pietism also became connected with new religious movements in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century — the evangelical movement and individuals and groups which stressed revivalism and religious renewal.

Plett follows Robert Friedmann<sup>24</sup> in contrasting pietism with early Anabaptism. While Friedmann's contrasts are still useful, they have not remained unchallenged and perhaps are too dependent on old-fashioned views of Anabaptism and pietism. This is not to deny that there is still much to be gained from his insights, and I also have benefitted from his incisive analysis. But while such contrasts can be useful, it is dangerous to impute ideal types to historical contexts; my own distinction between the

closed and the open,<sup>25</sup> valuable for heuristic purposes, needs to be qualified when considering actual historical sources.

Scholars of American Mennonitism can perhaps provide a lead here. Recent work by Schrag and particularly Schlabach and MacMaster indicate that we need to be very cautious in assessing the impact of pietism on Mennonite thought and practice.<sup>26</sup> In my own recent writing on the Russian experience I have increasingly come to realize that the influence of pietism was more varied, subtle and deeply rooted than I previously had allowed for.<sup>27</sup> During the eighteenth century in Prussia pietist ideas and concerns had been thoroughly incorporated into Mennonite life through the language of hymns, prayers and private religious discourse used to express personal faith. This occurred predominantly in private spheres of religious life. In my earlier writings I now consider I overemphasized the public, communal-based features of ideology at the expense of the personal private dimension. At the heart of Mennonite faith, probably since its earliest days, has existed a deep sense of personal faith, but a faith which was poorly expressed because it lacked not only the means for open expression, but also because any public exhibition of such faith was condemned as a sign of pride. Instead, in the public domain, Mennonites expressed the subordination of self to the external ethic of congregation and community (*Gemeinde*). Individual salvation was something which one could only live in hope of, by existing in a sustaining community of believers who guided the committed Christian along the narrow path of life.

What Mennonites lacked, and what pietism seemed to offer, was a means to publically express the personal experience of faith implicit in Mennonite religiosity. Pietist ideas and concerns also enriched and expanded the ability of Mennonites to experience and express individual aspects of faith. In the end such ideas became so dominant in the public arena that older concerns with community ethics became subordinated or were even denied as mere hollow orthodoxy, unnecessary for salvation.

Between eighteenth century Prussia and mid-nineteenth century Russia pietism shifted from the utterances of a minority, mainly religious leaders, expressed privately in diaries and letters, to more open conventicles which, through contact with evangelical influences, encouraged study groups, supported missions and philanthropic work beyond the confines and concerns of the established congregations. Eventually, through contact with a more aggressive evangelical pietism associated with ideas of conversion and total renewal, Mennonites developed the desire and means to express individual faith more forcibly than ever before, claiming knowledge of personal salvation through a conversion experience. The need of congregational and community support to sustain the hope of salvation became superfluous. This ultimate state of individualized, personal faith achieved by some Mennonites before 1850

was in fact tempered in the Russian Mennonite experience by powerful conditions of Mennonite communal dependence, part social (kin and village) and part political (colony and identity). The contrast between the older community based religiosity, and the new individualized faith was best summed up by an early Brethren minister, Jacob Bekker; among the KG he noted: "Conversion was not mentioned among them. As late as 1855, the truth [sic] that whosoever wants to die saved must first be certain that he possesses salvation was strange to them. Many said, 'You will only find out whether you are saved only up yonder'." <sup>28</sup> Between the idea of a conversion experience with the certainty of individual salvation, and that of a life-long commitment to a Christian ethic through a personal covenant with God and a community of believers, there is room for an entire theology.

But while such things may indeed be a matter for theological reflection, it is not enough to treat Mennonite thought as a factor which can be considered apart from wider social and cultural influences. The emergence of individualism in European thought is a complex issue and pietism is but a small part of its history. <sup>29</sup> The transformation of European thought was accompanied by the transformation of society, as agrarian society gave way to industrial society in the nineteenth century and concepts of the person and of the meaning of human existence were profoundly altered. <sup>30</sup> The Mennonites did not, and could not, remain untouched by these influences (see also below).

Plett suggests that pietism first deeply affected the Mennonites in Russia rather than Prussia, more particularly with the arrival of new emigrants from Prussia between 1818 and 1820, many of whom were Frisians (86-7, 174-9). These Mennonites Plett argues arrived "to initiate a post millennial earthly reign of Christ in the Molotschna" (187) because they were committed to Jung Stilling's writings. Klaas Reimer valiantly denied this new heresy, but the activities of the new immigrants in an alliance with a progressive minority in Flemish congregation caused a major schism in that congregation. This division set the pattern of Molochnaya religious and cultural life for the next fifty years with three factions: the old, culturally orthodox "Grosze Gemeinde" (Lichtenau-Petershagen), the culturally progressive pietist Ohrloff congregation and the small Anabaptist-Mennonite KG, legitimate heirs to Mennonite traditions and protectors of the faith. <sup>31</sup> Can such a view be justified?

Firstly Plett provides only a confused account of the division of the Flemish congregation in the 1820s, primarily because he again depends too closely on Reimer's account of events. <sup>32</sup> The arrival of new immigrants from 1818 onwards who belonged to different congregations (Frisian and Groningen Old Flemish) challenged the legitimacy of the dominant Flemish congregation. As the aim had been to establish a unified community in the colony, the leaders of the new congregations

agreed to co-operate with the existing ministry. To this end they formed a new groupings under the title the *Vereinigten Gemeinden an der Molotschna*, where each congregation would maintain its independence, with its own ministry, but all would recognize the legitimacy of each others' ordinances and practices. The later Groningen Old Flemish arrivals who formed congregations based on Waldheim and Gradenfeld in the 1830s joined this union. It was in this spirit of reconciliation that the Frisian elder, Franz Görz, ordained the new Flemish elder Bernhard Fast. Plett confuses this congregational union with the later Agricultural Union (269 and 316n2) and the grouping with the later Church Council (*Kirchen-Konvent*) established in 1851 which included all the major congregations in the colony (180, 280, 281).

The attempt at reconciliation was accompanied by wider ecumenical activity. By the early decades of the nineteenth century the evangelical movement which had begun in western Europe in the late eighteenth century had reached Russia, bringing with it a concern with Bible distribution missions, philanthropy and educational reform. In Russia these activities received official sanction from the Emperor himself, and it is not surprising that Mennonites also became involved. One of the chief activities was involvement with the Russian Bible Society, but a concern with missions, interest in foreign tract literature and Christian education also manifested itself. While the evangelical impulse certainly involved individuals and groups holding pietistic ideas, and while it is also true that some believed the final days had arrived and Russia was a place of refuge, such ideas were not central to evangelical concerns and few Mennonites followed millennial ideas at this period.<sup>33</sup> It is quite incorrect for Plett to suggest the Mennonites were subject to missionization by evangelicals (174) or that the Bible Society was a pietistic organization, promoting wider religious concerns and staffed by worldly individuals (87, 314). The Mennonites involved, freely entered into contact with these groups and pursued the new ecumenical activities with such fervour that Elder Bernhard Fast succeeded in alienating a large proportion of his own congregation.

Reimer's reaction to the new arrivals, to the spirit of reconciliation and to the ecumenical activities is entirely predictable, given his earlier stance. The new arrivals came from outside the Flemish tradition, reconciliation implied compromise, ecumenicalism involved association with the world and Christian groups holding alien views. Reimer was given an opportunity to join the new union, but refused; it is not surprising therefore that when the KG's next elder, Abraham Friesen, in 1838 requested that one of the elders ordain him they refused, because he and his group would not join them (280). The KG's reasons for rejecting the activities of the leaders of the Union closely paralleled those of the leader of the larger Flemish (Lichtenau) congregation which separated in 1824.<sup>34</sup> They and the KG objected to links with outside Christian groups and the

promotion of higher education (see Abraham Friesen's comments, 270, 271). The objections were not to pietism *per se* but a reaffirmation of the principles of conservation, maintenance and continuance (see below) that were not part of a wider reaction among Mennonites to the radical innovations occurring in Russia as an agrarian society met the challenge of a rapidly changing world. This reaction to change can clearly be seen in the writings of Heinrich Balzer, and indicates that far more than an opposition to pietism was involved in the stance of the KG.

### Why did Heinrich Balzer join the KG?

Robert Friedmann first drew the attention of Mennonite scholars to Heinrich Balzer when he published a translation of his remarkable essay on *Faith and Reason*.<sup>35</sup> Plett reproduces this paper, but also presents a number of new, very interesting and highly important additional writings by Balzer which add considerably to our understanding of nineteenth-century Russian Mennonite thought.

Who was Heinrich Balzer? Plett identifies him as a senior Frisian minister who rejected his congregation's pietist and millennialist leanings, joined the Ohrloff congregation and eventually left to join the KG in 1833 in order to return to his Anabaptist-Mennonite roots (158, 214 etc). Unfortunately almost all this is incorrect.

Plett correctly points out that a Heinrich Balzer was a minister of the Frisian congregation who emigrated to Russia in 1819. Ordained in Prussia in 1800 he was the senior minister of the Rudnerweide congregation and leader of one of the parties of emigrants.<sup>36</sup> But by 1828 there were *two* Heinrich Balzers listed as members of the united Molochnaya congregations, one identified as "Heinrich Balzer jun." and probably the son of the senior Balzer.<sup>37</sup> A listing of Prussian and Russian ministers in 1835 clearly identifies two Balzers, except the senior Balzer is still listed in the Rudnerweide congregation and the other, obviously the younger, is listed with the KG.<sup>38</sup> Finally a document from the 1860s in which the minister Nikolai Schmidt justifies his separation from Gnadenfeld to form what was to become the nucleus of the Templar group cites the case of one Heinrich Balzer of Rudnerweide who had earlier left his congregation.<sup>39</sup>

Why did Balzer leave his congregation? Although Balzer provides a clear set of reasons, Plett fails to follow up the points Balzer raises (214-5) seeing his separation merely as just a defection from pietist and progressive tendencies in his own congregation. In his letter addressed to the elders of the Molochnaya congregations involved in the union, Balzer mentions a book by a Hunzinger which he indicates precipitated his action. The book in question was written by a south-German Mennonite, Abraham Hunzinger, and contained detailed proposals for the reform of Mennonite life.<sup>40</sup> After presenting a rather odd account of the origins and

history of Mennonite communities, Hunzinger outlined plans of how Mennonites could abandon various outmoded practices, including rules against marriage with outsiders, the use of the ban, non-involvement with civil government and objections to military service. He also suggested broad reforms in education and the establishment of a salaried ministry. Although no Russian Mennonite subscribers are listed in the book, Prussian Mennonites are represented and the book was obviously known in Russia. A government account of the Mennonite colonies published in 1842 cites the book as a useful source for information on the Mennonite faith.<sup>41</sup>

Reading this reactionary book appears to have been a revelation to Balzer and forced him to reconsider his previous support for progressive ideas and innovations. He realized that the direction of reform encouraged by the congregations in the Molochnaya union would ultimately lead to the dissolution of Mennonite life and the establishment of a "worldly" ethic as proposed by Hunzinger (219). The time had come to reaffirm basic Mennonite principles. Hunzinger's reforms were more concerned with rationalism than with pietist principles, and Balzer's treatise on faith and reason is, in part, undoubtedly a debate with the issues raised by Hunzinger. But this paper, and many of Balzer's other writings reproduced by Plett, indicate that Balzer's objections to the programmes of reform and the changing tenor of life in the Molochnaya involved other issues than those proposed by Hunzinger and point to a widening KG concern about the need to hold on to Mennonite principles than had been apparent in the early days of the movement.

While objections to smoking tobacco, wild social gatherings and non-resistance are still voiced, new issues are raised: ostentatious dress and a desire for innovations, wealth, reading foreign literature, contact with "worldly" Christian groups and objections to higher education all became more apparent (Balzer, 225, 244-5, Abraham Frisen, 270-1 etc). What emerges is an ever-expanding critique of the pattern of social change which by the 1830s was very apparent in Molochnaya. Religious literature was circulating in increasing quantities, the government was about to begin a massive programme of reform and secondary education was being expanded with the establishment of the Halbstadt school in 1835.<sup>42</sup> Balzer believed that the Mennonites should not accept such alterations to tradition without question and that they should reconsider the basic foundations of their faith. It was for these reasons that he joined the KG, because he believed that it, rather than the reactionary Lichtenau congregation, represented a continuation of the true Mennonite faith.

### The Cornies era: accommodation and compromise?

When Klaas Reimer died in 1837 the KG lived in a far more complex world and faced problems very different from those they had experienced

in 1812–14. But with men like Balzer and their new elder, Abraham Friesen, they possessed a competent ministry. During the 1840s the KG leaders were to face new challenges as the programmes of reform, led now by Johann Cornies, created considerable conflict in Molochnaya. The authority of the congregations, particularly the dominant Lichtenau congregation, was challenged as the District Office and the Agricultural Union under Cornies' direction transformed the colony. But the KG response to events which saw the government remove three elders from office and which brought secular change to many aspects of social and economic life, was not entirely consistent with their earlier stand.

Elder Abraham Friesen lived in Cornies' home village of Ohrloff, a centre of reform and Heinrich Balzer lived close-by in the village of Tiege. Balzer knew Cornies well as Abraham Braun reported:

Ihre [the KG] Sonderstellung wurde etwas gemildert durch das Eingreifen des Vorsitzers Joh. Cornies, der einen gewissen Prediger Heinrich Balzer aus der Kleingemeinde, einen liberalen und verständigen Mann, für sich gewann. Dieser verstand es, den Gliedern der Kleingemeinde beizubringen, dass der Vorsitzter Johann Cornies nur Gutes für unser Volk im Auge habe. Schade, dass dieser Mann nicht länger lebte; er starb in den besten Jahren.<sup>43</sup>

The role of Cornies in the KG gaining "official" status in Russia has always been held up as one of his more redeeming actions in the field of religious affairs. Able administrator and loyal servitor of the Russian state, Cornies' own religiosity and contribution to the spiritual well-being of the Mennonites have always been difficult to assess, in spite of some heroic attempts on the part of his early biographer.<sup>44</sup> Cornies ought to receive Plett's condemnation, but his role in the recognition of the KG saves him from such an ignominious fate. He is excused as only having "mild-pietist-cultural" tendencies and redeemed because he was willing to co-operate with the righteous Anabaptist-Mennonites (i.e. the KG) (7, 290, 307). But the extremely interesting documents presented by Plett suggest a rather different explanation of the relations between the KG and Cornies. The first document is a petition, written with suitable expressions of humbleness, to Eduard Hahn, acting head of the Russian Guardian's Committee and the power behind Cornies' control of the colony. The letter is an expression of unqualified support for the District Office and civil authorities (282–3) and is dated just six days prior to Hahn's dismissal of the elder of the Lichtenau congregation, Johann Warkentin. Warkentin's removal, provoked by his clumsy attempts to seize control of civil affairs in the colony and depose Cornies, removed the greatest obstacle to Cornies' plans for reform in the colony.<sup>45</sup> Plett fails to report the obvious connection between the KG petition and these events or the fact that the KG leadership was tacitly condoning Hahn's intended course of action. The KG had experienced considerable opposi-

tion from Warkentin and members of his congregation, no doubt because both congregations claimed to be the legitimate heirs of the Mennonite tradition, and the KG leaders probably were pleased to see the elder removed. The fury of some members of the Lichtenau congregation to the actions of the KG is clearly reflected in Abraham Friesen's reply to one of its ministers, his brother-in-law Heinrich Neufeld (282-6). The stand of the KG probably also prompted accusations to be laid against them concerning their use of private dwellings for worship in contravention of the fire regulations (288-90). But as a result of official attempts to resolve this difficulty the KG received official recognition in July 1843 (290).<sup>46</sup>

Was this recognition just a result of Cornies' sympathy? The KG were law-abiding colonists and excellent farmers so there was little reason why recognition should continue to be withheld. The major opposition to the recognition of the KG had come from the established congregations, in particular the large Lichtenau group, and now with their power destroyed and Cornies in control, nothing stood in the way of recognition. It was also highly anomalous for a group of colonists not to be fully recognized by the civil authorities (apparently the KG were not always included in official statistical returns by prejudiced village officials). But was recognition also a reward for their support of the civil authorities and of Cornies in the struggle to remove Warkentin?

Official recognition obviously had both advantages and disadvantages for the KG. Now they were incorporated into civil affairs; it is only after this period that some members became village mayors (116) and perhaps school teachers (131-3).<sup>47</sup> But the leadership was also embroiled in Cornies' continuing confrontations with various congregational leaders. For instance the documents Plett presents concerning the dismissal of Elder Peter Schmidt of Waldheim in 1844, provide us with more information on this affair than was previously available (293-7). Schmidt had only arrived in southern Russia with his Groningen Old Flemish Congregation in 1836 and apparently was unwilling to follow many of the established rules for the admission of outsiders to his congregation. He baptized a Lutheran youth which, although not illegal, required official consent and was frowned upon by Cornies because it created difficulties in official categorizations of colonists. Schmidt also allowed members of the Gnadenfeld congregation to join his community while still banned by their own congregation. This violated the established practice that members who wished to transfer to another congregation required a certificate granting permission from their own community; those still under a ban naturally could not transfer. In fact while the KG agreed that individuals banned by their congregations could not be admitted into another congregation, they had earlier rejected the need for transfer certificates (281). But the KG did not support Schmidt and he was removed. There may well have been more behind Schmidt's dismissal than is apparent; in 1842

he had ordained Heinrich Wiens to lead one section of the Lichtenau congregation which had been divided into three by Hahn.<sup>48</sup> Wiens, however, was recognized as the legitimate leader of the old congregation and was to become the third elder to be dismissed during Cornies' reign in Molochnaya.

The KG reaction to dismissal of Wiens is extremely interesting. Wiens became the focus of opposition to Cornies' policies and practices in Molochnaya, but the actual circumstances of his removal involved his rejection of the use of corporal punishment in civil affairs, an issue which had been central to KG opposition to civil authority. Wiens stood by his principles, but Hahn intervened, threatened the Mennonites with removal of their privilegium and requested the elders to provide an opinion of whether or not they supported Wiens' position. Elder Bernhard Fast of Ohrloff asked the KG elder if he would join in their discussions, but Abraham Friesen sidestepped the issue by claiming that as the union had rejected his earlier request for ordination, he could not co-operate with them (315). Plett provides a very biased interpretation of this affair (314), unjustly condemning Fast, one of the ablest congregational leaders of the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> The fact that the KG felt uncomfortable with Wiens' removal (as indeed most of the other congregational leaders did) can be seen in Abraham Friesen's long-winded and rambling response to Wiens' moving farewell sermon (308-13).<sup>50</sup> Plett claims Friesen provides a "refreshing neutral view" of events (314)!

In his discussion of these and earlier events, Plett is at pains to stress the continuity and consistency of the KG stand, but the evidence suggests quite a different interpretation. While the KG may indeed have believed they were maintaining a consistent stance, it is obvious that they were interacting with, and sometimes reacting to, the rapidly changing social and political world around them. In the Cornies era there are clear signs of accommodation and compromise, not always consistent with their earlier position or expressed ideals. In many ways this raises important issues regarding the ideology of the KG and Plett's argument that they are the legitimate inheritors of what he calls the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision.

#### Continuity, Maintenance and Conservation: towards a wider understanding of the KG.

Plett states unequivocally "the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde was largely an attempt to recapture the Anabaptist vision" (6, 145) and that they constituted "a remnant . . . striving to be a true Gemeinde of God in the spirit of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision" (173-4). This is doubtful on a number of grounds. The idea of an Anabaptist vision is an invention of twentieth century North American Mennonitism (Plett

reprints Bender's famous essay, 31-41) which has been severely criticised by recent scholars of early Anabaptism.<sup>51</sup> It is incorrect anyway to ascribe to Reimer, and any other group of nineteenth century Mennonites, a vision they neither possessed nor mention in their writings. The very idea of "recapturing" something would probably have been frowned upon by KG leaders; they were not doing anything new, but merely linking themselves with the basic and fundamental tenets of Mennonitism which they had derived, unbroken, from the established traditions of their ancestors.

At the core of KG conservatism lay an appeal to continuity and continuance through the maintenance of the known and the established. I was once cautious about using the term "conservative" because until recently it has had negative connotations.<sup>52</sup> Conservatism was opposed to liberalism and was supposed to engender narrow-mindedness, backwardness, and ignorance in contrast to liberalism's progress, achievement and enlightenment. Such views derive largely from the transformation of European thought and culture in the nineteenth century and are directly related to the problem of understanding the KG. If we stop thinking about conservatism as purely an ideological stance, and consider in its verbal form — to conserve — as an activity directed towards an end, conservation, it loses some of its negative connotations. This concept can now be added to others I have presented elsewhere<sup>53</sup> to establish a matrix of activities and ends pursued by the KG and some other Mennonite groups over the centuries: to conserve and to preserve what is true and established, to maintain basic ideas and practices, to continue traditions unchanged to achieve maintenance, continuity and the conservation of fundamentals. Such was the thrust of KG ideology as it emerged in Russia, but this was built on older Mennonite principles.

We must be careful, however, not to apply such notions uncritically to historical phenomena. All ideas, like the socio-cultural systems to which they relate, include assumptions of continuity; people think and act on the basis of precedent for meaning is dependent on interpretations of past experiences and presumptions of order and regularity. While continuity certainly exists, the idea of continuity is probably much stronger than the reality of persistence. All socio-cultural systems have to be reproduced in time; people are born and die, social units shift and change, resources have to be extracted from the environment, creating a landscape which eventually reflects a long history of human activity. In this reproduction of human existence nothing is reduplicated in its entirety; all reproduction involves a degree of change which in the end results in a fundamental transformation of the conditions and perhaps the experience of existence. I say "perhaps" because where change is slow, where there is a stress on continuity and where few cultural mark-

ers exist to express discontinuity, there is often little or no appreciation of change.

Where various groups have created the possibility of stressing continuity, an awareness of change within and outside their community, may become more marked. This is precisely what many Mennonite groups achieved and they developed sophisticated strategies of maintenance and conservation to counter change. While some of these strategies were related to the general conservative ethos of agrarian societies in pre-industrial Europe, others were based on more specific Mennonite religious principles. Thus negative attitudes to external ideas and innovations, because they belonged to the "world," and the positive ascription of communal solidarity as essential for ensuring the possibility of salvation, were combined with powerful social and cultural practices to create the possibility of closed, self-sufficient communities, separated from the larger world. I say "possibility" because actual closure, which required the drawing of distinct external boundaries, a clear negation of the "world" and the enforcement of internal rules to ensure community discipline, were only activated in particular historical circumstances. While such closure did occur in Mennonite societies before the nineteenth century, usually in response to external threats or to what was perceived as a weakening of Mennonite resolve to maintain and conserve tradition, it was in the nineteenth century that the strategy of closure became most profound and at odds with the general tenor of life.<sup>54</sup>

With the emergence of widespread industry and the decline of agrarian society in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century, Mennonites were faced with a major challenge to their implicit ideology of continuance, and the maintenance of their religious practices and communities. Industrial production transformed economic life, social forms and social relationships brought forth new concepts and attitudes and through improved means of communication disseminated innovations and new ideas widely. Agrarian society gave way to industrial society in both urban and rural areas.<sup>55</sup> With the development of new perceptions concerning the past and the future, faith in continuity gave way to positive views of change, progress and discontinuities with the past. In larger society concepts of tradition and of traditional custom emerged from this epistemological break.<sup>56</sup>

What has all this to do with the KG? I would argue that, although the initial formation of the KG belonged to an established pattern of reaction to perceived inadequacies in the ideas and practices of existing Mennonite groups, its continuing development was a response to the transformation of Mennonite society from an agrarian to an industrial society, itself a reaction to larger forces of transformation in nineteenth century Russia. While the KG may have stressed continuity and maintenance, we should not confuse their ideological position with the actual historical

processes involved in their development. The KG were just as much a product of their time as were the Mennonites who chose the path of progress and responded to external influences and ideas. Both groups experienced fundamental transformations in Russia and it is an illusion to see the KG as merely a continuation of "traditional" Mennonite society or a last refuge for "Anabaptist-Mennonite" ideals.

It would be interesting to compare the emergence of conservative Mennonite groups in Russia in the nineteenth century with similar developments in North America at roughly the same period. Recent research into seventeenth and eighteenth century North American Mennonite communities has revealed that most were not totally separated from neighbouring groups and the closure of communities was largely a nineteenth century phenomenon.<sup>57</sup> While seventeenth and eighteenth century America was a very different environment from the older, more structured world of Prussia during the same period, it would be useful to know more about Prussian communities during this time. Did they also maintain connections with their non-Mennonite neighbours, their separateness being more the result of rural isolation (frontier isolation in America), than the result of clearly articulated principles of closure? Or was it the more tolerant atmosphere of America which encouraged association, whereas continued opposition in Prussia drew Mennonites together, forcing them to erect barriers and to depend upon each other?

Another point worth considering in this comparative framework is the emergence and persistence of new forms of conservatism in the pioneer world of America and Russia in the nineteenth (and in the Americas into the twentieth) century, whereas there was a rapid decline and eventually a demise of older conservative groups in western Europe during the same period. It was surely the spirit of official tolerance to Mennonite thought and practice in Russia and America which in part allowed conservatism to flourish, but it was also a reflection of the greater cohesion of Mennonite society in these areas. The conservatives, although reacting against larger forces of change, experienced these changes at the local level; their reaction primarily was against other Mennonites and this enriched their ability to articulate their rejection of new ideas and institutions and to strengthen the basis of their appeal to continuity. In Russia the colony system forced the KG to remain in close contact with other Mennonites until they emigrated to North America in the 1870s and because of this their ideology and practice of conservatism was strengthened and extended in reaction to a changing Mennonite world.

From the outset the KG reacted against the contradictions implicit in the Mennonite response to the Russian environment. This reaction was more clearly articulated as they became increasingly conscious of the disparity between Mennonite ideals and practice and, in adapting to the

new environment, there was a deepening division between a perceived need for continuity of tradition and the desire for reform and change.

There is no use in attempting to deny that the KG were reactionary. Like other groups who attempted to continue, to maintain and to conserve they ultimately became trapped in an endless series of rear-guard rejections of many aspects of life. But the KG remained remarkably consistent in their rejection of change and in their appeal to what they perceived as the essential and established foundations of faith. After all if, as they believed, their forefathers had established the true faith, who were they to know better, least of all to proclaim the discovery of new insights? If truth were really true, it was not relative to changing conditions in the wider world. And if all Christian life was devoted to the hope of salvation, it had to be consistent.

Innovations were not just manifestations of the world, but also threatened the consistency of existence. But behind this vision of faithfulness to the past, lies a fear that a loss of continuity exposed Mennonites to damnation (see Balzer's comments, 223). The truth their ancestors had established was an ancient truth; the "world" was both damned and becoming increasingly degenerate, condemned to oblivion since Adam's fall. Christ had indicated the way to redemption by showing people how to live in hope of salvation; Constantine had betrayed the community of believers; their Anabaptist ancestors had reestablished the true basis for salvation. Such ideas belonged to older views of a world in decline, of golden ages long past, ideas that were challenged and overcome by the concepts of human progress and enlightenment. The principles of conservation, continuity and maintenance were thus an attempt to confront time and to escape its passage along the broad path to "worldly" damnation; the narrow path to salvation strangely lay outside the passage of normal human existence. But although the KG could deny worldly time, there were problems in avoiding its influence.

When Reimer's son designed a new wagon, his father was forced to reject it: "Although the wagon would not have been for wealthy people it was nonetheless something new" (189). Fashionable clothes were rejected both because they were new and because they were "pleasing to the world" (251, see also 250, 254). Higher schooling, foreign literature and rational ideas were rejected because they too were new, unnecessary for continued existence and because they established links with groups beyond the tradition (220, 223, 225, 268-71).

But among the KG such rejection and denial was accompanied by a restatement of Mennonite principles, fundamentals, foundations (255, 264, 271 etc). This was the positive side of the KG negation of the "world." In confronting change, the KG were forced both to articulate, clearly and precisely, their objections to change, and to formulate their own position more succinctly. The general writings of the KG, rather than

their blinkered interpretations of particular events, present an insightful critique of Mennonite society in a process of transformation. They were able to reflect upon the world around them, on their place in that world *and* to propose an alternative. Their clarity of reflection, as well as the articulation of the basis of their faith is one of the redeeming aspects of the documents Plett presents. The KG clearly restate basic principles of faith on such matters as community, discipline, Christian love and the ban, the dangers of "worldly" wealth and the duties of non-resistant Christians. In the writings of men such as Balzer and Abraham Friesen, there is a remarkable intellectualism; here are conservative philosophers, steeped in the Bible and the texts of the Mennonite tradition arguing sophisticated points of faith, albeit within a very restricted field of discourse.

One of the most interesting aspects of this attempt to produce an articulate negation of the "world," while at the same time presenting an alternative ideology and practice, was the KG attempt to reprint and distribute the basic texts of the Mennonite tradition. Plett presents a fascinating series of documents and an interesting commentary on this effort (275-8, 318-28). What Plett does not indicate is that this was in part a response during the 1830s to an influx of foreign religious books and tracts to the colonies and although on the positive side the books were intended to strengthen Mennonite faith, on the negative side they were to be the sole source of authority; all other books were outlawed.

Such reactionary negativism, combined with a positive programme of enrichment for a restricted Mennonitism, is one of the paradoxical features of the place of the KG in the nineteenth-century Russian-Mennonite history. Their reactionary negativism links them closely with other conservative groups such as the Lichtenau congregation, but their positive programme aligns them with the progressives and indeed they appear to have felt more sympathy with the Ohrloff congregation than with any other group. The Lichtenau congregation also claimed to maintain and continue fundamental Mennonite traditions, but the majority of their members did so without any corresponding articulation of what such a claim implied. But while the majority of their lay members were conservative because of their limited understanding of their tradition and the world around them, there is no reason to assume that all were just "cultural" Mennonites. The writings of elders such as Heinrich Wiens and Isaak Peters show that in other conservative congregations there were articulate, competent spokesmen. Even the KG contained members who lapsed into a conservatism which was entirely negative, erecting sterile barriers and rejecting innovations on the basis of ignorance and prejudice. Klaas Friesen (184) is a case in point and the KG leaders constantly had to exhort their members to avoid the sin of pride in considering themselves superior to others.

Perhaps what we need is to expand and refine our appreciation of

Mennonite strategies of conservatism just as we need to be more sensitive and understanding of how new ideas and practices, such as pietism, have contributed to Mennonite experience. If we are willing to accept that the move towards closure and towards openness in Mennonite attitudes to the world was in part a response to larger changes in Europe and America during the nineteenth-century, perhaps we can avoid the competing claims of various Mennonite groups today to be legitimate heirs of particular Anabaptist ideas or true reformers of faith and examine Mennonite experience as a set of historical problems. But history, with its stress on the fact that human experience is relative, has never been a good basis on which to build a theology.

### Conclusion

On reading Plett's book I was struck by the similarity between his method of presenting documents with textual commentary and that of P. M. Friesen in his classic volume *The Mennonite Brotherhood*. But here the similarities end. Although Friesen was certain that the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren had contributed greatly to the development of Mennonite religious life in Russia, after more than twenty-five years of collecting and interpreting the documents of the Brethren's secession he was less sure about the correctness of their separation. He realized that many of the Brethren's leaders were all too human and their opponents were not as evil or unenlightened as many of the Brethren made them out to be. Friesen's sense of unease comes through strongly in his writing and while he undoubtedly censored certain details so as not to offend the Brethren who had commissioned his work (unsuccessfully as it turned out), the early Brethren appear "warts and all." Plett does not exercise the same caution or sensitivity. For him things are black or white, good or evil. Anabaptist-Mennonite ideas and its defenders are opposed to Pietism and its supporters; all the KG leaders apparently were righteous figures, brilliant and eloquent, whereas their opponents were insensitive, prejudiced and spiritually dead. Only those who supported the KG are redeemed.

Friesen's book deals primarily with the Brethren, just as Plett deals with the KG. But because Friesen, like Plett, also presented a more general history of the Mennonites it has become accepted as *the* source for understanding nineteenth-century Mennonite life. This is more a consequence of subsequent events than a result of Friesen's intention that his work be so interpreted; war and revolution destroyed much of the material upon which further study could be based and emigration and resettlement prevented the writing of more scholarly accounts. Unfortunately one result of the dominance of Friesen's book is that the place of the Brethren in Mennonite history has been grossly inflated. But Plett's

response has been to compensate for this by inflating the importance of the KG; Reimer he tells us was "one of the most important Russian Mennonite leaders of the nineteenth century" (148). The survival of the documents on the KG, like those of the Brethren, is an accident of history. Just as we lack the rich documentation to show the general development of religious renewal and revival in nineteenth-century Mennonite Russia, so we also lack sources on the widespread conservative reaction in the colonies. At the same time all these ideas need to be placed in a much wider context involving developments in Russia and in western Europe during the last century.

All scholars working on the Russian Mennonite experience, however, owe a debt of gratitude to Plett for his efforts in collecting, translating and publishing these new sources relating to the KG. His interpretations, however much one might disagree with some of them, are a challenge to us all to reconsider aspects of the Russian Mennonite experience. I am sure there are many besides myself who are looking forward to Plett's promised further volumes on the KG, which can only enrich and enlarge our understanding of Mennonite history.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>*The Golden Years: the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849)* (Steinbach: D.F.P. Publications, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>Delbert F. Plett, *History and Events: Writings and Maps pertaining to the History of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from 1866 to 1876* (Steinbach: D.F. Plett Farms, 1982).

<sup>3</sup>P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, Cal.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp. 127-33; Al Reimer ("Klaas Reimer: rebel conservative, radical traditionalist," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 3 (1985), pp. 108-117) has also used the full autobiography in an interesting reconsideration of Reimer's life.

<sup>4</sup>The numbers in parentheses refer to page references in *The Golden Years*.

<sup>5</sup>In his address to the conference on Mennonite Russian history, Winnipeg 1977; I am grateful to Dr. Bangs for many insights on the KG over the past ten years.

<sup>6</sup>For instance discipline and the ban, marriage and divorce, the smoking of tobacco, abuse of alcohol, violence between brethren etc., all were condemned frequently by Prussian congregational leaders in the eighteenth century.

<sup>7</sup>G. G. Pisarevsky, *Pereselenie prusskikh mennonitov v Rossiia pri Alexandre I* (Rostov on Don, 1917). In fact many of the village communities outlining their histories in 1848 boasted openly of the wealth they had brought with them, M. Woltner, *Die Gemeindeberichte von 1848 der deutschen Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer* (Leipzig, 1941).

<sup>8</sup>Lew Malinowski, "Passage to Russia: who were the emigrants," *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia* 2 (1979), pp. 46-7.

<sup>9</sup>See James Urry, *The closed and the open: social and religious change amongst the Mennonites in Russia, 1789-1889* (Unpublished D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1978) p. 432n; this information I owe to Dr. David G. Rempel.

<sup>10</sup>Wiens was in office from 1804 to 1806; Plett seems to think he was District Mayor for much longer (see 165, 180) which is incorrect.

<sup>11</sup>(1728-1805) his nephews were Peter Epp (1755-1802, minister in Khortitsa 1796-1802) and Heinrich Epp (1757-1805, minister 1786-1805).

<sup>12</sup>See Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 158-9; Figure 2 indicates the web of kinship.

<sup>13</sup>See the contemporary account of Jacob Wiens published in *Der Bote* 5 January 1938, p. 4 from the archives of the Danzig congregation; the ministers were Jakob Enns, David Hiebert (Hubert) and Abraham Wiebe.

<sup>14</sup>Urry, *The closed and the open*, p. 162.

<sup>15</sup>Reimer, "Klaas Reimer," p. 116 n 10.

<sup>16</sup>Mainly by a group from Muensterberg; see Reimer's comments (169).

<sup>17</sup>This contrasts with the situation in Khortitsa where the second elder, Johann Wiebe, was closely related to leading members of the Prussian congregations and he built a ministry around him of people similarly related, see Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 122, 126–28, 158–9.

<sup>18</sup>In fact the only independent account of Enns is found in Abraham Braun, "Kleine Chronik der Mennoniten an der Molotschna seit ihrer Ansiedlung bis mein 80. Jahr", *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* 1906–7, p. 67; Friesen (*Mennonite Brotherhood* p. 92) obviously bases his comments on Reimer's account.

<sup>19</sup>See Reimer's account (169/170) where he indicates that Enns was willing to step down as elder, but then changed his mind and the other senior ministers were involved with Reimer in confronting him.

<sup>20</sup>See note 5.

<sup>21</sup>Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 116–117, 121–25.

<sup>22</sup>In fact Plett is not entirely consistent in his terminology; in one place (264) he refers to the "retrenched anticultural Grosze Gemeinde."

<sup>23</sup>There appears to be some problems with the idea of "persecution," for although the KG were reported to the authorities for refusing to partake in aspects of civil government, it is clear that Reimer continued to meet other congregational leaders and billeted Elder Peter Wedel in 1821 (176).

<sup>24</sup>Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite piety through the centuries: its genius and its literature* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical, 1949).

<sup>25</sup>Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 106–13.

<sup>26</sup>Martin H. Schrag, "The impact of pietism upon the Mennonites in early American Christianity" in *Continental pietism and early American Christianity*, ed. by F. Ernest Stoeffler (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1976); Theron F. Schlachach, "Mennonites and pietism in America, 1740–1880: some thoughts on the Friedmann thesis," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (hereafter *MQR*) LVII (1983), pp. 222–40; Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, piety, peoplehood: the establishment of Mennonite communities in America 1683–1790* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1985), Chapter 6.

<sup>27</sup>I am grateful to a number of Mennonites for discussing this issue with me (although they cannot be held responsible for my interpretation), in particular Helena Janzen, Peter Letkeman and David Schroeder.

<sup>28</sup>Jacob P. Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, Kans.: the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), p. 18.

<sup>29</sup>By agrarian society I mean a hierarchical system of estates, not just rural society; of course Russian society remained predominantly rural throughout the nineteenth century.

<sup>30</sup>On concepts of the person and individuality see Louis Dumont's, "The modern conception of the individual," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 8 (1965), pp. 13–61, and "A modified view of our origins: the Christian beginnings of modern individualism," *Religion* 12 (1982), pp. 1–27.

<sup>31</sup>Plett's claim (264, 304) that the KG therefore became (recognized as) the senior congregation in the Molochnaya is unfounded; seniority belonged to the original Flemish congregation although whether it remained with the larger Lichtenau or the smaller Ohrloff group was a matter for dispute.

<sup>32</sup>I have written a much more detailed account of these events, see James Urry, "'Servants from far': Mennonites and the pan-evangelical impulse in early nineteenth century Russia" (To be published in *MQR*).

<sup>33</sup>See Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 240–2.

<sup>34</sup>Rather than call this group the Grosse Gemeinde I will refer to it as the Lichtenau congregation; the smaller group I shall call the Ohrloff congregation.

<sup>35</sup>Robert Friedmann, "Faith and reason: the principles of Mennonitism reconsidered, in a treatise of 1833," *MQR*, 22 (1948), pp. 75–93.

<sup>36</sup>Woltner, *Die Gemeindeberichte*, pp. 139, 142.

<sup>37</sup>Franz Isaak, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten: ein Beitrage zur Geschichte derselben* (Halbstadt, Taurien: H. J. Braun, 1908), p. 112; whether or not he was a son of the senior minister should be able to confirm as there is a genealogy of the Balzers which I have not

seen; Maricha Voth, *The Heinrich Balzer genealogy, 1775–1959*, (North Newton, 1959).

<sup>38</sup>Adalbert Goertz, "Die Mennonitengemeinden Altpreussens und Osteuropas in Jahre 1835," *Ostdeutsche Familienkunde*, 13 (1965), pp. 112, 113.

<sup>39</sup>Isaak, *Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, p. 240.

<sup>40</sup>Abraham Hunzinger, *Das Religions-, Kirchen- und Schulwesen der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten; wahr und unpartheilich dargestellt und mit besondern Betrachtungen über einige Dogmen, mit Verbesserungs-Vorschlägen versehen* (Speyer: Kob'schen, 1830); see also the article in the *Mennonite Encyclopaedia* by Christian Neff, "Hunzinger, Abraham," 2, p. 845.

<sup>41</sup>"Opisanie mennonistskikh Kolonii v Rossii," *Zhurnal Ministerstva Gosudarstvennykh Imushchestv* (1842) p. 34 note; the author is given as Heinrigger and the place of publication as Riga which is probably the place of importation.

<sup>42</sup>See Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 257–89, 306–10; James Urry, "'The snares of reason: changing Mennonite attitudes to 'knowledge' in nineteenth-century Russia,'" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 25 (1983), pp. 306–7.

<sup>43</sup>Braun, "Kleine Chronik der Mennoniten," p. 69.

<sup>44</sup>David H. Epp, *Johann Cornies: Zuege aus seinem Leben und Wirken* (Steinbach: Echo Verlag, 1946), p. 141; on Cornies see also Harvey L. Dyck, "Russian servitor and Mennonite hero: light and shadow in images of Johann Cornies," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 2 (1984), pp. 9–28.

<sup>45</sup>On these and subsequent events see the discussion in Urry, *The closed and the open*, pp. 310–34.

<sup>46</sup>Isaak (*Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, p. 92) dates this document as January but this is obviously a misprint.

<sup>47</sup>The KG had earlier rejected involvement in civil affairs (and after Cornies' death returned to this position); their attitude to village education is unclear although higher education was frowned upon, a point Plett does not make clear (134–5, 314).

<sup>48</sup>Isaak, *Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, p. 113.

<sup>49</sup>Plett's campaign against Fast is astounding; elsewhere he refers to him as "spiritually insensitive" (305, see also 290) without any real evidence.

<sup>50</sup>See Wiens' sermon in his *Ein Abschied und Bericht wie es in der Molotschner Kolonie in den Früheren Jahren zugegangen ist* (Plum Coulee, Manitoba: Abram Wolff, 1903), pp. 143–52; reprinted in part in Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, pp. 143–52.

<sup>51</sup>See for instance Werner O. Packull, "Some reflections on the state of Anabaptist history: the demise of the normative vision," *Studies in Religion*, 8 (1979) pp. 313–23; J. Denny Weaver, "Discipleship redefined: four sixteenth century Anabaptists," *MQR*, LIV (1980), pp. 255–79.

<sup>52</sup>Urry, *The closed and the open*, p. 108n.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid* pp. 107–113.

<sup>54</sup>See for instance Jacob Ammann's response in the seventeenth century, John A. Hostetler, *Amish society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980 (3rd edition)), pp. 25–49; there were many other smaller, and more localized reactions elsewhere in western Europe which by the end of the eighteenth century had created a bewildering mosaic of congregations.

<sup>55</sup>On the distinction between agrarian and industrial society see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1983).

<sup>56</sup>Eric Hobsbawm and Terance Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>57</sup>See MacMaster, *Land, piety, peoplehood*, Chapter 5, esp. p. 141; the possibilities for comparative study of different Mennonite groups is immense, for instance a comparison between the Oberholtzer division and the KG would be very instructive, see L. Harder, "The Oberholtzer division: 'reformation' or 'secularization'?" *MQR* 37 (1963), pp. 310–31, 42. See also the discussion in Theron F. Schlabach, "Mennonites, Revivalism, Modernity — 1683–1850," *Church History* 48 (1979), pp. 398–415.