

The Roots of Nazi Support Among Mennonites, 1930 to 1939 A Case Study Based on a Major Mennonite Paper¹

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A. Introduction

The extent to which fascism won support among masses as well as sophisticated elites in Germany, Italy and other countries has fascinated scholars for several generations. This brief study of Canadian Mennonite endorsement of the variety of fascism represented by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi movement fits into that genre. Specifically the question before us is as follows. How did it happen that a deeply religious, traditionally pacifist, and even politically aloof ethnoreligious group, such as the Mennonites in Canada, could become fertile and fruitful soil for Nazi propaganda? And how could it be that a major segment of the Mennonite leaders, in particular, could find National Socialism so appealing, quite apart from efforts expended by the Nazis themselves?

If we can provide the outlines of a response, or at least tell part of the story, then perhaps we will be better able to comprehend the current resurgence of fascist appeal in Europe and even in Canada. Moreover, since substantial numbers of our forebears allowed themselves to be blinded by that which Hitler represented, let us at least benefit from their delusion and misjudgment.

The million or so Mennonites in the world trace their origins back to the Anabaptist wing of the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century. Led by Conrad Grebel in Switzerland and South Germany, and by the major leader Menno Simons in the Netherlands and some regions in North Germany, the Mennonites are often described as the radical branch of the Protestant Reformation because they went beyond Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin in advocating not only believers' baptism, which would separate church membership from citizenship, but also "a voluntary, free, and independent religious organization entirely separated from the state."² The insistence on full religious freedom and the opposition to state religion precipitated persecution by both Catholics and Protestants almost to the point of extinction. But the Anabaptists, or rebaptizers, later called Mennonites after their leader Menno, survived and today number about one million globally.

For our purposes it is important to note that, beginning in 1683, many of the Swiss-South German Mennonites who survived the persecutions migrated to what is now the US, settling mainly in Pennsylvania and neighbouring states. Subsequently a minority moved to Upper Canada (Ontario), beginning in the 1780s. Large numbers settled in what became Waterloo County. Many of the survivors of the Dutch-North German group fled east, eventually settling mainly in the Danzig region. For religious and economic reasons, a mass migration, initiated by Catharine the Great, to vast, newly opened agricultural areas in South Russia began in the late 1780s. Many descendants of these "Russian Mennonites," who had lived in South Russia largely as a state within a state, migrated to Canada in the 1870s and more than 20,000 fled in the 1920s. Today their descendants constitute about 70 percent of Canada's Mennonite population. This paper deals mainly with these Canadian "Russian Mennonites," especially the refugees of the 1920s.

In this article we ask how the heirs of this tradition could, to a significant extent, become sympathetic to National Socialism. The complex answer draws on sociology, history, psychology, economics, religion, nationalism, racism, cultural integration, and immigrant alienation.

B. Methodology

One could develop various ways of assessing the nature and extent of Mennonite support for National Socialism in Canada in the 1930s. This essay will utilize quantitative and qualitative content analysis³ of the only major independent Mennonite newspaper, *Der Bote* (The Messenger), published in Canada in the 1930s.

While *Der Bote*, founded on January 14, 1924 and published in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, was not the largest periodical serving the Canadian Mennonite population during the decade in question, it was probably the most influential. His role may be surprising given its circulation of just under 2,100. As a non-

church related newspaper it was also the only one of the major papers which permitted wide-ranging discussion of religious, political, and social questions. A survey of the various periodicals and of the relevant sociological studies suggest that during the decade in question, January 1, 1930, to December 31, 1939, quite accurately mirrored the life and thought of the Mennonite people who migrated from the Soviet Union to Canada in the 1920s.

It should be noted that *Der Bote*, normally a six to ten-page weekly, held particular appeal for the more than twenty thousand Mennonites who had migrated to Canada from the Ukraine and Russia (the USSR after 1921) from 1919 to 1930. It should be emphasized that *Der Bote* held little appeal for those Canadian Mennonites whose roots lay in the earlier waves of migration. Therefore this study, in general, does not deal with those people. Early major waves of Mennonite migration from Eastern Europe to Canada had occurred in the 1870s and, to a lesser extent, at the turn of the century. By 1931, according to the Canadian Census Bureau, there were 88,736 Mennonites in Canada. By 1941 the total had reached 111,380.

In this particular study the space measure (column inches) was used to determine how much space was devoted to Deutschtum (Germanism) and National Socialism in this largely immigrant Mennonite press. The relevant material was further categorized as focusing mainly on cultural Germanism, racial Germanism, or political Germanism which in this case refers to National Socialism. The content was also categorized as being favourable or unfavourable and, in a few instances, neutral.

During the decade, 1930-1939, *Der Bote* carried a total of 12,471 column inches in 657 items discussing the ethnic, nationalistic concept of Germanism as a topic presumably of great interest to the ethnoreligious Mennonite readership. This content represented 5.27 percent of all the published space in the 10-year period. Approximately 83 percent of the content was favourable, 16.7 percent basically unfavourable and only 0.3 percent neutral. Cultural and racial Germanism, the central significance of the German language, and the supposed superiority of "Germanness" constituted key concerns. As we shall see, some of the affirmation of the German language, while strongly supportive of Germanism, related to the self-definition of an immigrant group and did not necessarily relate to National Socialism. Nonetheless, we should not minimize the extent to which various writers invoked National Socialist values in their pursuit of group self-definition.

Of the 12,471 total column inches, 2,174 focussed on racial Germanism, 3,620 on cultural Germanism, and 6,677 on political Germanism, notably National Socialism. The intense discussion of Germanism peaked in 1937. As the 1930s progressed, the substantial segment of the Canadian Mennonite population for whom *Der Bote* served as forum of exchange and mouthpiece, grappled intensely with the question of how they should relate to Hitler's ideology and plans. (For the methodology and the above details I am heavily indebted to Epp's dissertation.)

C. The Development of Pro-Fascist Tendencies Among Canadian Mennonites in the 1930s

Although pro-Nazi tendencies among this sector of Mennonites, as reflected in *Der Bote*, reached its zenith in 1937, certain key elements of such sympathies, if not orientation, were already evident when Hitler came to power in early 1933. In fact, some of the attitudes and values had an earlier genesis among Mennonites as they did among other German-speaking peoples. In that sense, some important elements for the Nazi worldview resonated with some attitudes and values which had developed earlier among the Mennonite people under consideration.

The development of fascist support among the Mennonites of Canada can be related to at least ten factors. As will be evident, several played a pre-eminent role.

1. *The Clarification of, and the Emphasis Placed on, National/Ethnic Identity*

After sojourning on the steppes of South Russia for more than a century, the Dutch-North German Mennonites living in those parts had developed a blurred self-image. Their almost exclusively Dutch origins were distant, their high German language acquired during several generations of residence in the Danzig region had engendered some sense of "Germanness", and their interaction with "Russians" had produced appreciation at least for the geographical aspects of their latest fatherland. In addition, the term "Mennonite," largely because of settlement patterns and restrictive Russian laws governing such settlements, had itself taken on an increasingly ethnic connotation. Thus it happened that a transplanted immigrant minority found itself in search of its own identity. Groups experiencing such ambiguity concerning identity and the resultant social insecurity have open ears or those who provide plausible, perhaps ennobling, explanations and answers.

During the 1930s hundreds of articles, letters, and editorials in *Der Bote* nurtured the notion that Mennonite peoplehood was Germanic and that this "fact" constituted a great good. This embracing of Germanism focussed especially on language, culture, and character.

The preservation and cultivation of German was presented with zeal, missionary passion, and an intensity suggestive of divine calling or holy obligation. The rationale was summarized by one correspondent, A.J. Schellenberg, as follows:

That we must be, and are, concerned to learn the language of the land, which is English, and to develop a certain facility in it, we recognize as one of our primary citizenship duties; in other words, we take it for granted. But that we should also be faithfully concerned about our mother tongue, the German language, to use it and to preserve it, and that we should be prepared to make big sacrifices for this glorious heritage is for us a holy obligation.

Why do we hold on so tightly to our mother tongue? (a) for her own sake, (b) for the sake of the culture which she represents, (c) for the sake of our ethnic self-preservation, (d) for the sake of our religion.

If we want to retain the merited respect, if we want to experience the fruits of German culture, if we want to remain true to our history and to strengthen our ethnic consciousness, if we want to deepen our faith, then all of this is intimately tied up with, and dependent on, the nurture and preservation of the German language.⁴

One educated Mennonite, who fled from Russia in the 1920s and then settled in Germany, observed that at one time Mennonites may have had Dutch roots but that experience belonged to the distant past. The germanization of the Dutch-German Mennonites, he insisted, had been completed as early as 1750, half a century before the migration to Russia.⁵

While the English language was good and necessary for material reasons,⁶ the German language was necessary for spiritual reasons. German and religion were the fountains of Mennonite faith.⁷ German energy, German strength to act, German intimacy, German depth, German hope, and German love were all closely linked to the German language and the German *Wesen* (soul or essence).⁸ And this German soul was to be preferred above the English soul which was less rational and more emotional than the German.⁹

Frequently writers praised the glorious heritage of the German culture and the virtues of the German character. To be German, said one writer, meant to live simply, naturally, hygienically, honestly, dependably, joyfully and morally.¹⁰ In short, Germanism was equated with virtue, grandeur, excellence, and success. One writer, who after World War II himself became editor of *Der Bote*, stated that Mennonites were willing to leave "Haus und Hof" (home and yard), so great was their determination "to remain German at any price".¹¹

2. The Assertion of Cultural Superiority

Given this self-definition of these Mennonites as German, and given the widespread and apparently increasing adulation by these Mennonite immigrants of virtually everything German, it should not be surprising that that assertiveness of German took on a sense of superiority. The recognized scholar, Benjamin H. Unruh, hinted at this perspective when he observed that an English Christian was rooted in the English family and a German Christian in the German family, each in his own place and where God had put him, for every *Volk* or family had its special divine mission.¹² Statement after statement indicates how an emphasis on uniqueness easily degenerates into an assertion of superiority.

"German people in Canada and in the United States, wake up! We are already losing... not only the German language but also the German cultural treasures".¹³ Jacob H. Janzen was truly concerned. After all, he described the German language as outstanding and German literature above other literature. German literature, he suggested, contributed to a solution of human problems,

not like the Russian literature, for instance, which never got beyond the formulation of problems.¹⁴ The German language, said another writer, unlocked a rich German cultural heritage not only in the realm of literature but in all other areas of human endeavour.¹⁵ A third correspondent asserted that in all handcraft and art, technology and architecture, the German style with its rich ideas had assumed leadership and become normative all over the world.¹⁶ Such assessments, carried periodically in *Der Bote*, generated very little differing response from its German-speaking Mennonite readership.

3. *The Tendency of an Ethnic Minority to Identify with a Larger External Entity*

We have already seen how the dominant segment of the Canadian Mennonite group in question redefined itself as German, not only German-speaking, and how it joined in the glorification of German language, culture, and character. A careful reading of *Der Bote* reveals that its clientele, even though lacking roots in Germany, gradually also identified itself with both the German people, "das Volk", and Germany as a country.

The tendency began even before Hitler came to power. The German consul for the prairie region, with offices in Winnipeg, spoke frequently at Mennonite meetings. His slogan was: "German custom and German essence (*Wesen*) shall prosper not only in Germany but wherever the German tongue is spoken".¹⁷ *Der Bote*, it appears, reported such assimilative language with approval.

Already in 1930 a German periodical in Germany published a major pro-racial and pro-German concern about the fate of all ethnic Germans, including the Mennonites, in the Soviet Union.¹⁸ A few years later the *Berliner Morgenpost* described the Mennonites in Canada as one of the strongest pillars of Germanism in that country.¹⁹

Numerous readers desired closer ties with Germany. Gerhard Toews called for a more adequate identity with the German nation.²⁰ Another reader explained himself very clearly.

First of all there is a little word *Volk*. I am happy that in our theme we are talking about "unser Volk" (our people) and not about our churches. As soon as we talk about our *Volk* we are all at home, then we feel secure and unified, for we all belong to one *Volk*. I can't really help it, but when I feel like our brethren in Germany a certain feeling of uneasiness comes over me...²¹

When, in 1937, the Hitler government urged Germans living abroad to act as interpreters of Germany's "peace policies" (*Friedenspolitik*),²² *Der Bote* carried a full account of the situation. Perhaps many readers shared the sentiments of the reader who proclaimed: "I have been born a German, and because of my blood must remain a German, whether I want to or not".²³ Those who did share the sentiments would surely have responded positively.

4. *The Openness to Nazi Propaganda*

It may seem strange that a traditionally pacifistic ethnoreligious people, such as the Mennonites, would be enamored by Hitler but many were. Their reasoning and rationalization came through in their statements.

Germany, in 1933, was in crisis, said more than one contributor and the country needed a strong *Fuehrer* or a solution to its many problems, a victory, would be impossible.²⁴ Germany was fortunate to have a *Fuehrer* who united and made strong what Frederick the First had conquered, what Bismarck had formed, and what Hindenburg had defended.²⁵ Germans were proud of their *Fuehrer* and all the world seemed to be jealous with many people and many papers expressing the hope “we wish for our nation an Adolf Hitler”.²⁶ The *Fuehrer* principle was, in fact, recognized as valuable not only in national affairs but also in church affairs and therefore recommended to the Mennonite people.²⁷

More than a few correspondents stressed that Nazi Germany was making decisions in foreign affairs, as in domestic affairs, on the basis of strong leadership with the goal of securing for the German people their rightful place and property under the sun.²⁸

The shift, not always particularly gradual, from being pro-German to being pro-Nazi seemed to come easily for many Canadian Mennonites in the 1930s.

5. *The Fusion of Faith and Culture*

Largely ethnoreligious peoples, such as the Jews and the Mennonites, at times have great difficulty differentiating between cultural and faith issues. The consequences can be problematic.

For Mennonites difficulties developed long before Hitler appeared on the scene. Overlooking the trans-cultural, trans-linguistic claims and tradition of Christianity, many spokespeople made very particularistic claims. Germanism and Christianity, even the somewhat pietistic and traditionally pacifist Mennonite variety, now came to be fused.

A prominent Canadian Mennonite leader, C.F. Klassen, who later organized massive trans-oceanic rescues of thousands of Mennonite refugees, observed that German and religion were the fountains of Mennonite faith.²⁹ P.A. Rempel asserted that, given Mennonite history, loss of the German language would mean a substantial loss of the Christian spirit.³⁰ Another prominent church leader put it this way:

“We German Mennonites are a religious society. Through the German language a significant stream of religious thought flows through our churches. This stream enriches the life of our families and churches. With the neglect of the German language this stream will cease and our church life will dry up...”³¹

Without any doubt, such fusion of faith with a particular language and culture was valid for those who experienced it, as it remains in our day in many

settings. But not to allow for alternate fusions not only denied the tenets and culture/linguistic pluralism of the Christian faith itself but also created great difficulty when the bulk of European Germanism took on a fascist guise. Only a minority seemed able, until the outbreak of war, to separate their German-Christian fusion from the fascist form of Germanism.

The complexity of the thought processes involved were reflected in the following lines:

German is the heart that beats within us,
 German the blood, German the hand,
 German was our mother's first kiss;
 German is the word and song and greeting;
 God has brought us into this world
 With a German soul and a German word.
 Someday our separate walls will fall,
 And nations will be brothers all.
 But now our paths alone we trod
 As Germans to the realm of God.³²

6. *The Acceptance of Racism*

Attitudes of racism pre-dated, coincided with, and outlasted Hitler. Although Christianity, including the Anabaptist-Mennonite version, specifically rejects and denounces racism, Canadian Mennonites have not been immune from this affliction.

Research indicates, as Canadian public policies amply reflect, that during the 1930s most Canadians were racist.³³ Canadian Mennonites, judging by *Der Bote*, believed that there was a biological basis for cultural and racial identities and that what was found to be biologically true was after the order of God. Many thought that both biological theory and theological doctrine were in line with the division of the human family into racial groups and that the mixture of these groups was wrong and harmful.

Blood qualities and relationships originating with the Creator were permanent and binding. The "doctrine" of race was thus not a German invention, although the Germans were the first to make the allegedly sensible demand that future policies should be determined by this doctrine.³⁴ The basis for the doctrine was God's creation. That is why Germans should not marry Jews or Indians. Mixing blood types produced serious negative racial, cultural, and spiritual consequences. To avoid such tragedy it was desirable, indeed necessary, to determine one's racial ancestry and to remain loyal to it.³⁵

It was only a matter of time and the whole civilized world would recognize that *volkstreu* (racial fidelity) was identical with *staatstreu* (national fidelity).³⁶ It was a Christian obligation for all Germans to seek close and intimate relations with the great German *Volksgemeinschaft* (racial fellowship).³⁷

7. The Acceptance of Anti-semitism

Having drunk deeply of the popular brew of racism, the Canadian Mennonites in question could, in large part, accept Hitler's fascist notions of anti-semitism. As for Canada in general, so also for this group of immigrants, the record is not inspiring.

In listing the achievements of Adolf Hitler, Walter Quiring—who became editor of the *Bote* 1955-64—included the notion of the ordering of the political life and of putting the Jews in their place.³⁸ Why did he and many others hold such views? What convinced them to swallow the fascist line?

Some reasons were given. The relationships of the Jews to the *Reich* were predetermined by what were assumed to be the friendly relationships between the Jews and communism and consequently unfriendly relationships with both Christianity and the German *Reich*.

It was argued, further, that not only were the Jews friendly to Communism but they were the founding fathers of Communism. Karl Marx, the first Communist, was, after all, a Jew, his name having been Karl Mordechai.³⁹ It was also widely believed that the link between Judaism and Communism had been documented by an institute for research on Judaism founded in Berlin in 1933 and in its publication, *Boleshevism and Judaism*.⁴⁰ Those who had experienced the revolution in Russia also were sure that Jews had been largely responsible.⁴¹

Another reason given for suppressing Jews was their dominant position in German affairs and their alleged determination to destroy the German people.⁴² Their predominance in medicine, law, press, and literature was allegedly due not primarily to intelligence but to a determined effort to seize power⁴³ and to use Germany as the base for achieving the international communist revolution.

Writers from within Germany, moreover, were careful to point out that the maltreatment of Jews in Germany was highly exaggerated by the foreign Jewish-dominated press.⁴⁴

Fortunately, concerning this matter there was also extensive rebuttal in *Der Bote*. Fascism preached a gospel of hate, one writer insisted.⁴⁵ National Socialism was too much persuaded of the superiority of the German nation and race, too much concerned with hating the enemy and avenging evil. As one teacher in Germany put it, "The German young people have learned something in these times. They have learned to hate."⁴⁶ Numerous other writers refuted hatred of the Jews but one gets the impression that they constituted a distinct minority.

8. Gratitude for Assistance from Germany

Groups which, in desperation, are aided by other groups do not readily forget—enquire of the Dutch for example, how they feel towards Canadians because of liberation during World War II.

The first expressions of gratitude, even political empathy, were related to the generosity of Germany and its president, Hindenburg, towards thousands of Mennonite refugees gathered near the gates of Moscow in the fall of 1929. About 5,670 of the estimated 13,000 managed to escape from Russia and enter refugee camps in Germany. Almost all of these desperate people moved on to Canada. The fact that Germany, although near economic disaster itself, managed to provide financial assistance and a temporary home, made a great impact on the Mennonite migrants. Their affinity for German culture, people, character, and nation increased massively.⁴⁷

One *Bote* reader stated that the German ambassador, Professor Otto Auhagen, who had helped first in Moscow and who later visited the refugee camp in Germany, was greeted "by us all as a father".⁴⁸ Numerous other writers submitted reports of gratitude. Hindenburg was especially revered for having made a very generous donation of his personal funds.

When President Hindenburg died, grateful immigrants in Canada sent a wreath to decorate his grave. A Winnipeg Mennonite businessman, reflected widespread Canadian Mennonite response when he wrote in his report.

Even on this, and especially on this, grave we plant our hope! Hindenburg passed away, called of God, but before he died, he placed his hand of blessing on the head of Adolf Hitler. The blessing of a Hindenburg comes from above! In it there is strength.⁴⁹

Deep-seated gratitude for what Germany did for destitute Mennonites before they came to Canada, and for struggling settlers in the early years after Hitler took office, facilitated a positive response to fascism itself.

9. The Emphasis Placed on Anti-Communism

As a people who had suffered terribly under communist rule, Mennonite refugees from the USSR were eager listeners when Hitler initiated his verbal and policy crusades against Communism. The anti-Communism included swift action against communists in Germany itself. The reports and analyses in *Der Bote* are numerous and extensive. A few examples indicate their general tone.

It was a huge assignment to "take the manure out of the social-democratic-communist barm", wrote Walter Quiring.⁵⁰ All that was rotten, corrupt, infectious, or to be more specific, all that was Marxist, Jewish ("actually all one and the same thing"), had to be thrown out.⁵¹ One of the greatest achievements of Adolf Hitler was halting the advance of Communism. All of Germany and, indeed, the entire world was indebted to National Socialism for stopping Bolshevism.⁵² Eventually Germany would crush and destroy completely the red colossus and thereby save the world from its archenemy.⁵³ While pure National Socialism was probably not the desired thing for Canada, it was clear that only a similar movement could save the American continent from Bolshevism.⁵⁴

Since Communism was so greatly opposed to Christianity and religion generally, it was especially significant that Hitler halted its spread. Indeed, the battle against Communism could be considered the primary responsibility of the Mennonites in their foreign missionary undertakings.⁵⁵ In his clear-cut stand against Communism, Hitler had proved himself a greater enemy of Communism than the church was. This fact also proved Hitler's sympathy with Christianity.⁵⁶

Various writers in *Der Bote* acknowledged Hitler's excesses in his anti-Communist ventures. Some were critical; most seemed to rationalize or justify. The more negative aspects of Hitler's fascism, generally, were compared to conditions in the Soviet Union where the situation was infinitely worse. If, then, some undesirable phenomena accompanied the German showdown with Communism, these negatives could be justified on the grounds that lesser evils were sometimes necessary to conquer greater evils.⁵⁷ Those who criticized or hindered the *Deutschtumsarbeit* (activity for the German Volk) were just like the Communists, therefore, "away with the Troztkys, forward with the Hitlers, with the nation builders".⁵⁸

Hitler's all-out, fascist-based, anti-communism created little difficulty for most Canadian Mennonites. For the 1920s wave of immigrants from the USSR it was probably the most appealing aspect of his fascism.

10. The Readiness to Believe and Accept, even if that meant Believing and Accepting Distortion of Reality

In being convinced, for the most part, of many supposedly positive aspects of Hitler and his fascism, Canadian Mennonites were hardly unique. They mirrored the dominant climate of their times. In 1937 Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had a long, secret conversation with Adolf Hitler. He said later that he had found Hitler to be "a simple sort of peasant," not very intelligent and no serious danger to anyone. King believed that Hitler was obsessed with the recovery of neighboring territories and that after he had accomplished these goals, he would be satisfied.⁵⁹

In the United Kingdom Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was, if anything, even less critical—hence his policy of appeasement. Significantly, in 1934 a previous British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, praised Adolf Hitler as a man of peace and wisdom, "the only man in these restless times who is keeping a clear head" and who, because of his domestic and international goals, would never risk war.⁶⁰ Could immigrant Canadian Mennonites be expected to express greater political astuteness and perspicacity than Canadian and British prime ministers?

And yet, one can fault the elites and opinion leaders, at least in part. Their theology, if nothing else, should have made them more cautious and circumspect. Some examples illustrate the point and suggest that even according to

their own worldview, which was not set aside, the Mennonite defenders of Hitlerian fascism are open to criticism.

Some of the traditionally pacifist Mennonites seemed eager to justify Hitler's military schemes. Readers were told that the remilitarization of Germany did not mean that Adolf Hitler or Germany were out for war.⁶¹ Hitler was a man of peace, not willing to hurt anyone. The clear statements in *Mein Kampf* were conveniently ignored.

Canadian Mennonite leader, C.F. Klassen, reminded the Mennonite people that "religion and *Deutschtum* were the fountains" which in past, present, and future provided the water of life for the Mennonites. Klassen was the first of the prominent Mennonite writers to hail the coming of Adolf Hitler for whom he thanked God. At last a man had been found "who gathered the national idea, who had the courage to clean up the social-democratic rot, the communist insanity, and the machinations of the Jews".⁶²

It was through Adolf Hitler and his takeover of power that the church was saved and that religion again became respectable, of which the return of the masses to the church was good evidence. Religious instruction had again become obligatory in schools. The members of the *Reichstag* attended a *Gottesdienst* (church service) before beginning the day's work.⁶³

It was B.H. Unruh's opinion that Christianity could serve the purpose of purifying and sanctifying Germanism. Politically this was possible because many Germans, indeed, many National Socialists were sincere believers. Even Hitler asked the people to pray to God for grace.⁶⁴ Hitler, Unruh had earlier assured Mennonites, had already demonstrated that he had a real love for his people and the individual and that he would never permit the state to replace the individual.⁶⁵

As for the designation, "Heil Hitler", Walter Quiring viewed it as a means by which millions could express their desire for strength, health, knowledge, in short, the blessing of God for their spiritual leader in his titanic battle against evil.⁶⁶

To the question whether Hitler was being adulated too much, David Toews wrote, "The general answer is: he has deserved it. If the largest majority of 87 million intelligent people and to the largest extent also Christian people, who know the man, speak favorably of him, how should someone, who has never seen Germany before or spent only a few weeks there, have an opinion different from the opinion of many?"⁶⁷

All of this assessment sounded singularly out of tune with traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite views and values.

As late as February, 1939, Julius Heinrichs was still lauding Hitler's presumed piety. After all, Hitler had concluded his New Year's greeting to the German people with "may the grace of our Lord God carry the German people also into the future".⁶⁸

It should, at this point, not come as a great surprise to discover that *Der Bote*, an influential and dominant organ of a mainly pacifist ethnoreligious immigrant group, stooped to the point of carrying contributions from Propa-

ganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler himself.⁶⁹ Military recruitment ads also were carried.⁷⁰

D. Conclusion

This brief overview cannot prove why trends developed and results happened but, utilizing content analysis, it can illustrate part of reality. It makes no greater claims. It has not analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology employed. It is neither exhaustive nor definitive but, rather, illustrative. It describes how large numbers of Canadian Mennonites in the 1930s, by gradual stages and for enunciated reasons, embraced all or part of Hitler's fascism. The story, however unfortunate it may be, is instructive for a particular ethnoreligious group, for an entire country, and for humanity.

Notes

¹This paper was presented on March 4, 1994, at Wilfrid Laurier University as part of a symposium, "Legacies of Fascism in Canada." The bulk of this paper is based on Frank H. Epp's Ph.D. dissertation, "An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspaper of a Canadian Minority Group, the Mennonites, in the 1930s". The dissertation was submitted to the University of Minnesota in 1965. At various times Epp and I discussed the dissemination of his controversial findings and conclusions. Epp passed away in 1986.

²C. Henry Smith. *The Story of the Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office, 1950, p. 2).

³For an early description and defense of content analysis see Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communication Research* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952). It should be noted that while this article focuses on *Der Bote*, there were other influential Mennonite papers, notably the *Monnonitische Rundschau* in Winnipeg and the *Steinbach Post*, which expressed sympathy for National Socialism and Adolf Hitler. See specifically the fine study by Jonathan F. Wagner, *Brothers Beyond the Sea, National Socialism in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1981). See also Benjamin Redekop, "The Canadian Mennonite Response to National Socialism," in *Mennonite Life* (June 1991), pp. 18-24.

⁴A.J. Schellenberg, "Die provinziiale Vertreterversammlung in Herbert, Saskatchewan, am 16. und 17. Juli", *Der Bote*, VII (October 1, 1930), pp. 3-4.

⁵Benjamin H. Unruh, "Praktische Fragen", *Der Bote*, XIV (January 20, 1937), pp. 1-2.

⁶B.B. Wiens, "Bericht des Vertreters des Zentralen Mennonitischen Immigrantenkommitees fuer Ontario", *Der Bote*, VII (November 26, 1930), pp. 1-3.

⁷C.F. Klassen, "Der Weg der praktischen Hilfe", *Der Bote*, VIII (February 18, 1931), p. 1.

⁸Dr. Boelitz, "Muttersprache als Deutscher", *Der Bote*, XII (May 29, 1935), p. 3.

⁹J.H. Janzen, "Der deutsche Gedanke", *Der Bote*, XVI (August 12, 1936), pp. 1-2.

¹⁰K.W. Gruppe, "Unser Maedchenschulgedenktag am 2. Januar, 1938", *Der Bote*, XV (January 19, 1938), pp. 1-2.

¹¹Walter Quiring, "Kanadische Mennoniten im Chaco von Paraguay", *Der Bote*, XI (February 28, 1934), p. 4.

- ¹²B.H. Unruh, "Grundsatzliche Fragen", *Der Bote*, XII (August 7, 1935), p. 1.
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