



BAPTISTS AND MENNONITES IN DIALOGUE

**Report on Conversations Between
the Baptist World Alliance and
the Mennonite World Conference
1989-1992**

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A PERSONAL JOURNEY IN UNDERSTANDING

In 1947, when I began training as a pastor in Australia, the terms "Mennonite" and "Anabaptist" were, for all practical purposes, unknown to me and my contemporaries. Through the acerbic judgments of Luther and Calvin we learnt to dismiss Anabaptists as an odd phenomenon of the Reformation.

By 1959, while studying church history in Chicago, I became more personally acquainted with the radical reformers through the pages of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. This time I learnt from their own writings and confessions of faith, rather than from what others had said about them. Franklin Littell's *Anabaptist View of the Church* taught me as much about Baptist views of the Church as it did about Anabaptist ecclesiology.

I made it my business to travel to Goshen, Indiana, to meet Harold Bender, doyen of modern Anabaptist historians, who, when he learnt that I was planning to begin a seminary in Western Australia, offered me a complete set of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

From then on my understanding and appreciation of the Radical Reformation grew rapidly. The new Theological College (Seminary) in Perth slowly began to gather a collection of Anabaptist-Mennonite materials, which, though small, became the most significant collection of its kind in Australia.

Such was the background and interest I brought to the presidency of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) in 1985.

In common with other major denominations in the 1980s, Baptists were pursuing a path of conversations with various communions: Reformed, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic. Why not Mennonites? We hold so much in common theologically, for example:

- a high view of the Church as a gathered community;
- a love for the Scriptures;
- a keen sense of the importance of liberty of conscience;
- a strong belief in the importance of the separation of Church and State.

The then General Secretary of the BWA, Dr. Gerhard Claas, shared my interest in promoting dialogue. When he died suddenly in 1988, his successor, Dr. Denton Lotz, gave his support to the idea, and arrangements were set in train for a series of conversations spanning from 1989 to 1992.

The learning process has been a vivid and enriching experience for both groups. Amongst other things, Baptists gained insight in the Mennonite (Anabaptist) sense of community and their passionate devotion to the doctrine of peace; Mennonites learned more of the over-riding Baptist concern for evangelism as expressed in the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18-20).

But even more than this, all members of the consultations felt a growing sense of sympathy and respect for each other. Both groups contained denominational leaders, but the growing sense of kinship among a dozen people could only be a seed - a mustard seed at that - but if the joint recommendations are pursued, the spiritual results to both communions could be incalculable. The seed could become a large tree. Such, at any rate, is the prayer of all those who participated.

G. Noel Vose
Past President
Baptist World Alliance

PREFACE

The four years of theological conversations in which Mennonites and Baptists engaged from 1989 to 1992 were historic not only for the event but also for the process. We found that from many different avenues of Christian service and a wide expanse of geography, we easily became brothers and sisters in Christ.

For many years both Mennonites and Baptists at the international levels had engaged in ecumenical dialogue with numerous other denominations. Baptists have held dialogues with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and various segments of the Reformed tradition. Likewise, Mennonites have discussed issues of theological and practical concern with Lutherans and the Reformed churches. It was fitting then that we should join in a truly Free Church conversation ourselves.

The plan for a meeting of representatives from the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite World Conference was jointly nurtured by Noel Vose and Paul Kraybill. Both had a history of deep appreciation for the other's tradition. From this beginning teams were chosen to represent broadly our constituencies.

The purpose of our getting together was stated as follows:

To engage in theological conversations exploring each other's history, theology, and faith; to engage in a common search for greater mutual understanding in the hope that we may find new areas of common agreement.

Some have asked whether the goal is to seek a merger of these two denominations. The answer is NO; the purpose is rather to get to know each

other better, to deepen our fellowship in the body of Christ and to explore whether there are some common projects in which we can cooperate.

Our first meeting was held at Eastern College in St. David's, Pennsylvania, an American Baptist-related institution. There we focused upon our individual backgrounds as members of the two teams; Paul Kraybill and Noel Vose presented papers on the denominational heritages of Mennonites and Baptists worldwide, and we carefully laid out our agenda for the next four years, based upon critical questions we identified in small groups.

To introduce ourselves to each other, we were each asked to say in one or two words what we think is the most important Mennonite or Baptist value. The Mennonites said: community, mutual aid, discipline, service, love, peace, justice, global church, discipleship, suffering. The Baptists said: religious liberty, freedom (of conscience/of interpretation), soul liberty, believers' baptism, autonomy of the local church, witness, evangelism, separation of church and state, believers' church.

The second session of our conversations was held at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana, a Mennonite institution. There we interacted with papers on the Dutch connection between the groups, biblical interpretation, individualism-community relationships, Christian service, the social gospel and the African-American influence upon Baptists. We also visited Menno-Hof, a center of Mennonite interpretation.

The location of our third meeting was McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, a Canadian Baptist-related institution. At McMaster we focused our attention on the nature of the Church, worship, the ordinances/sacraments, and evangelism. We also began to note areas of convergence and divergence between Baptists and Mennonites.

Our fourth and final session was held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands at the Singelkerk, a seventeenth-century Mennonite congregation to which John Smyth and Thomas Helwys and the earliest Baptists had definite connections. Overlooking the historic canals, we reviewed our previous

work and completed the task of preparing the final draft of our joint report. In the evenings we rediscovered the places and routes of our religious ancestors in ancient churches, alleyways, and archives.

Our final report defines the areas of discussion points which we share in common, and those positions where we differ. Often we wrestled with definitions of the same realities. Many times we rediscovered that our views of Scripture, the Church and Christian service were very close. And we also realized that our divergent paths from the seventeenth century have left us in differing places of emphasis. We made no attempt to conduct primary research into our topics of interest, for the literature of both traditions is vast. Instead, we attempted to present our denominations faithfully and listen to each other in an attempt to understand better our commonalities and areas for growth in relationships.

All of us on both teams realized after our first session that personal bonds were being created across confessions. This was deepened after the tragic loss of Dr. Heather M. Vose from our midst in 1990, and after travelling and rooming together in differing contexts. Not unlike Hans de Ries, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys almost four centuries ago, we discovered a true sense of brotherhood and community in sharing our stories. We unanimously agree that this was an unusual theological conversation, in that we were able to experience for ourselves the values which we had previously discovered in the pages of history and literature.

At the beginning of our conversations, it was observed that the original theological conversations between Baptists and Mennonites had ceased amicably about 1630. Basically, our ancestors just stopped writing to each other! We were pleased to have begun anew that historic conversation.

Ross T. Bender, Chair for the Mennonite Team

William H. Brackney, Chair for the Baptist Team

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATIONS (1989-1992)

As part of an ongoing series of conversations with other world Christian denominational groups, the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) invited the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) to engage in theological conversation. Both BWA and MWC had previously been in dialogue with the Reformed churches, but this new conversation was unique in exploring commonalities in history and free-church tradition as well as discussing faith and practice. The purpose, as stated at a meeting of BWA and MWC leaders in McLean, Virginia, August 25, 1988 was to "engage in a common search for greater mutual understanding in the hope that we may find new areas of common agreement." Each body appointed a team of five persons plus a chair and a staff facilitator; these eleven men and three women, from Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, and the United States were primarily teachers and scholars. In four annual meetings, hosted alternately by the Baptists and the Mennonites from 1989 to 1992, they presented papers on significant issues from the authority of Scriptures to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, from individualism vs. community to the Church in the world. At each meeting the participants celebrated their groups' original contacts in 1608, and also experienced warm "family reunion" fellowship, with discoveries of many cherished practices and theological emphases held in common.

The conversations made no attempt to cover the many topics of systematic theology. Baptists and Mennonites share the great affirmations of orthodox Christian faith, but because both groups are congregationally organized and both are non-creedal, the shades of theological difference within the two world bodies are likely to be as significant as the differences between

Baptists and Mennonites. Topics chosen for examination were in general those that distinguish Baptists and Mennonites from other Christian traditions or that distinguish Baptists and Mennonites from each other. The following report is limited by the fact that it was written by a group composed primarily of Caucasians from North America, who particularly explored the history and foundational documents of the two groups, and whose direct knowledge of the Church of Africa, Asia and Latin America is limited.

The final meeting in Amsterdam, in August 1992, prepared the following report for the members of the Mennonite World Conference and the Baptist World Alliance. Each section alternates Baptist and Mennonite statements and ends with a list of convergences and divergences between the two groups as observed in the four dialogue sessions. The lists are not exhaustive, and the points identified as divergences tend to be relative differences in emphasis rather than mutually exclusive positions.

These comparisons are not designed to express relative value judgments about the two groups: instead they are attempts to focus issues about which continuing dialogue may be productive. The members of the dialogue teams learned much from each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. The recommendations in the final section of the report express their conviction that other Baptist and Mennonite individuals, congregations and associations should discover or rediscover each other in dialogue, cooperation, and Christian fellowship at many levels.

INTERSECTING STORIES

Origins

Mennonites derive from the Anabaptist movement which began in Zürich, Switzerland, in 1525, as a radical split from the Reformed movement and then emerged semi-independently in several locations in Germany and Holland, growing rapidly despite severe persecution from both Protestant

and Catholic churches. The major Anabaptist groups emphasized the Believers' Church, whose members 1) were baptized as adults, 2) committed themselves to searching the Scriptures in disciplined groups, and 3) literally followed Christ's teachings of nonresistance (with refusal of military service), sharing goods, the refusal to swear oaths (including oaths of allegiance to the state), and the Great Commission to evangelize. After the 1540s, Anabaptists were increasingly known by the name of their Dutch leader, Menno Simons. By the end of the sixteenth century, Mennonites experienced toleration in the Netherlands, but persecution and hardship elsewhere led to continuing migrations.

The Baptists emerged in a small band of Puritan/Separatist dissenters from the Church of England, who emigrated to the Netherlands in 1607 under the leadership of John Smyth. In Amsterdam, where Smyth rebaptized himself and some thirty followers, they sojourned with the Waterlander Mennonites and many ultimately joined them. However, a minority under the leadership of Thomas Helwys returned to England in 1612 to preserve their English identity and more Baptists and the Amsterdam Mennonites continued their contacts until about 1630, although they differed on issues such as war and oath-taking. The Particular Baptists, who emerged in the 1640s in London with a strong Calvinist theology and conviction about immersion, sought their own contact in 1640 with the Dutch Rhynsburgers (which included Mennonites), who baptized by immersion. It was the Particular Baptists who ultimately flourished and spread to North America and other continents.

Developments

Dutch Mennonites experienced a "golden age" of peace and prosperity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Under continuing persecution, Swiss Anabaptists, including the Amish, fled to Germany and France, and then mostly to North America. Many Mennonites of Dutch background had migrated to drain the swamps of the Vistula River delta near Danzig, then after the 1780s to open new farm lands in the Ukraine, and then in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries to settle in North and South America, always in search of military exemption and freedom for their religious community. Hardship and persecution led Mennonites to keep themselves in German-speaking communities, practicing mutual aid, simplicity, and nonresistance. Mission efforts were renewed in the nineteenth century, at first among the Dutch and Russian Mennonites, who were influenced by Baptists and various German Pietist groups. By 1900 North American Mennonites learned from other Protestants to organize vigorously for education and overseas mission, but local evangelism generally was weak. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy created tensions before World War II. After the war, the most dynamic trends have been 1) the development of peace-and-justice concerns among North American and European Mennonites and of worldwide service programs under Mennonite Central Committee; and 2) the emergence and rapid expansion of Mennonite churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The number of baptized Mennonites on these three continents will soon exceed the number of Mennonites in North America and Europe. Total world membership of Mennonites is about 900,000.

Baptists migrated as individuals and later congregations to the British colonies in North America, beginning in the 1630s. In New England, the maritime provinces, and the middle states, associations developed and churches were planted along the moving frontier. In the South, Baptists thrived in an unusual way among both Caucasians and African-American populations, with the resulting Southern (predominantly Caucasian) and National Baptist (predominantly African-American) Conventions being the largest bodies of Baptists in the world. In the United States, Baptists became keen advocates of evangelism, home mission work, and religious liberty, the latter issue most often expressed in the doctrine of separation of church and state.

From the United States and Great Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Baptists launched major efforts in world mission. Unions or conventions of Baptist churches exist in virtually every country, with large communities of Baptists in Myanmar, India, Brazil, Nigeria,

Zaire, Korea, Russia and the Ukraine. Baptists over the years have been active in benevolent enterprises such as Bible translation and distribution, education, cross-cultural services, and refugee resettlement.

Theological confessionalism among Baptists arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in North America and Britain. New Baptist groups with strict confessional boundaries added variety to the original streams of the denomination; many of these groups do not participate in national and international bodies of fellowship. In the 1990s, Baptists number over thirty-eight million (baptized) members worldwide.

Contemporary Intersections

The Baptists considerably influenced the origin and development of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia in 1860; the question of their Mennonite or Baptist identity was often hotly debated. Currently, in what was the USSR and in Germany, many former Mennonites identify themselves as Baptists. In North America, where both groups are fragmented, the Mennonite Brethren have had the closest relationship to Baptists. Mennonites have attended Baptist seminaries, served as missionaries under Baptist agencies, and joined Baptist churches. There has often been cooperation between local Baptist and Mennonite congregations and between Baptist and Mennonite mission agencies overseas, for example in India. Helpful exchanges have occurred at Believers' Church conferences, like those in Canada and the United States in the 1980s. In social services, Baptists have cooperated with Mennonites, for example, in the World Food Bank in Canada and in various projects of the Mennonite Central Committee. Baptists and Mennonites have therefore continued to show a high regard for each other in matters of faith and practice.

Mennonites and Baptists today are increasingly aware of the points of intersection in their history, even though they have each developed in unique ways. Baptists are less conscious of their seventeenth-century roots than Mennonites. Mennonites in North America, Europe, and in the

communities that have migrated from these continents, have maintained strong ethnic and cultural identities and have not been very successful in local evangelism. Baptists through evangelism, have grown spectacularly in North America among African-American, Caucasian, and other ethnic groups. Today there is a genuine desire among many Mennonites and Baptists to learn from each other's strengths so that together they can achieve a greater measure of faithfulness to the gospel.

THE BELIEVERS' CHURCH

Baptists and Mennonites together affirm the great common core of Christian faith, in our worship of God, our proclamation that Jesus is Lord, and our earnest searching of the Scriptures, guided by the Holy Spirit. The 1989-92 theological conversations focused less on these issues than on matters related to our identity as believers' churches. These were organized under three headings: 1) the nature and role of authority in the Christian life, 2) the nature of the Church, and 3) the mission of the Church in the world. Each of them can be discussed in greater depth in the future to illuminate both our shared convictions and our differences. Underlying these church-related issues, however, are certain differences of emphasis in interpreting our common faith, for example, the meaning and implications of Jesus' death on the Cross, that Baptists and Mennonites need to probe and share in further conversations.

AUTHORITY

Mennonites and Baptists both stem from the larger Reformation movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which defined the locus of authority in opposition to the concepts of authority which had developed in the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformers strongly rejected the authority of the Pope and of church tradition and strongly asserted the authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) and the priesthood of all believers. What appeared to be a relatively simple choice between two competing sources of authority has proved over the centuries to be a much more complex issue. It continues to be a matter of serious debate and repeated fragmentation in many church traditions.

Mennonite Perspectives on Authority

Anabaptists in the sixteenth century have often criticized the mainline Protestants for not putting into practice what they confess concerning the

Scriptures. Obedience to the written word of Scripture has been regarded as the true test of faith for Mennonites. Believers are called to mutual discernment and admonition as it relates to life. Anabaptists in the sixteenth century were much more concerned about discipleship (orthopraxy) than about right belief (orthodoxy). The fact that they and their descendants have not produced major systematic and philosophical-theological treatises is more than a matter of circumstance. Although persecution and martyrdom in the early years prevented many of their leaders from writing extensively on doctrinal issues, the writings that exist show much more concern about questions of ethics and community. Anabaptists did not generally reject the historic creeds of the Christian Church, but neither did they elevate them to the position that the creeds held in other traditions. Although Mennonite denominations today have confessions of faith, they are reluctant to use them in a very prescriptive manner and are quite open to revising them.

Another important issue for the Anabaptists was the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Whereas the view of the mainline Protestants is sometimes characterized as a "flat book" approach, the Anabaptists emphasized the priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament. Furthermore, in other traditions the writings of Paul and the Gospel of John are cited frequently, especially in relation to conversion and justification, whereas Mennonites often elevate the synoptic Gospels, and particularly the Sermon on the Mount, above the rest of the New Testament.

The Anabaptists were especially concerned about the authority and example of the life of Jesus. Jesus was seen as the central expression of God's revelation to humankind. Although the divinity of Jesus was strongly affirmed by most, Jesus' human nature received much more attention by most Anabaptists. Even Jesus' suffering and death were seen as a model for Christians. Among the Dutch Anabaptists, however, a unique Christology emerged which emphasized the divinity of Jesus in a particular manner. This resulted in an intense struggle for the purity of the Church to reflect the perfect divinity of Christ.

The Church, or *Gemeinde*, was clearly another locus of authority for the Anabaptists. Matthew 18:15-17 has been called the basis of church government among the Anabaptists. The authority of popes, priests and scholars was rejected in favor of a more radical concept of mutual admonition and the priesthood of believers was more important than the training of an individual or his appointment by the temporal authorities.

Finally, some Anabaptists pointed in a new way to the authority of the Spirit. For them, the written or outer word alone was dead; the inner word was the voice of the Spirit. Although Mennonites have not on the whole been characterized by a unique emphasis on the Spirit, considerable attention has been given to the function of the Spirit, in community rather than on the personal gifts of the Spirit.

Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and Mennonites in later centuries have often departed from such idealized versions of Anabaptism. Some have been extremely literalistic and legalistic; some have experienced the tyranny of individuals over communities to enforce conformity; still others have experienced the extreme pressures of conformity to the community and its traditions. In the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries some were caught in a web of apocalyptic extremism and millenarianism which focused on selected portions of both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Mennonites also have been influenced greatly by modern intellectual and scientific developments. The advent of modern science (especially Darwinism) and modern methods of Biblical interpretation affected Baptists earlier and more profoundly than Mennonites, but Mennonites in Europe and North America have also had to deal with these influences. Some have retreated from these modern influences and have sought refuge in small rural communities where the authority of their traditions and the authority of their leaders has brought a measure of security. Others have been influenced by revivalism, dispensationalism, fundamentalism, or even by modernism at the other end of the spectrum. Mennonite fundamentalism has often taken a unique shape, concentrating on plain

dress and rejection of modern technology. As many Mennonites have become urbanized, Mennonites concepts of the authority of community have come under a severe stress.

Mennonites today range widely in their interpretation of the Scriptures and the role of the community. Some are preoccupied with concerns about the nature of inspiration (inerrancy, infallibility, etc.) while others are more concerned about the relationship of Christology to ethics and mission. Some Mennonite theologies make the case that Anabaptism really represents a third way which is neither Catholic nor Protestant. To confess “Jesus is Lord,” is to express the authority of Jesus in terms of a new lifestyle of servanthood and suffering love. Jesus is the model and the power for a transformed world order. The atonement is regarded as more than substitutionary. The vertical dimension of reconciliation with God is balanced by a concern for the horizontal dimension of reconciliation with fellow human beings.

Despite Mennonite concerns about community as the locus of authority and the focus of salvation, there has been serious breakdown in the experience of this reality. Ironically, discipleship and community have often become creeds rather than visible realities. The ultimate test of Mennonite conceptions of authority remains the commitment to a life which results in new communities of love and service.

Baptist Perspectives on Authority

The problem of authority has always been a controversial issue in the life of the Church and, like the Mennonites, Baptists struggle with questions of its nature, forms and function. Baptists understand authority as the *right* and *power* to command *obedience* in the context of *responsible freedom*.

But this statement needs explanation. The word *responsible* underlines the fact that relationship is the essential medium in which authority functions:

no relationship, no answerability. The term *right* indicates a claim that is just, that is a capacity to create a sense of obligation. Where authority is real, one ought to obey. *Power* indicates the ability to assert and maintain a just claim. *Obedience* expresses recognition of *right* and *power* in terms of appropriate *behaviour*. The term *freedom* gathers up the ideas of relationship, justice and answerability which distinguish authority from coercion.

Among Baptists, religious authority centers in the person of Christ. Thoroughly trinitarian, Baptists affirm in all matters of faith and practice the Lordship of Christ (Philippians 2:9-11). Baptists have stated this clearly: we revere and obey the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Savior, the sole and absolute authority as revealed in the Scripture and present in the Church.

Christ's *person* binds all humanity to God transfiguring the Creator-creature relationship with a new moral dimension. Christ's *work* unites power and right with love so that his command is never arbitrary. He approaches his church with the words, "You call me Master and Lord, and you are right, for so I am" (John 13:13). The claim is made against the background of self-giving service and love in which he locates his authority. To this the Church can give only one response: "Jesus Christ is Lord."

Scripture is also an important source of authority for Baptists. Because Jesus Christ is Lord, his attitude to Scripture is paramount, and also quite clear. Through Scripture he expresses his will which is to be heard and obeyed as finally authoritative. Baptists therefore have no difficulty in embracing the Reformation dictum of *sola scriptura*: in contrast to many Reformation churches, Baptists do not accord any official authority to creeds. Scripture is viewed as having the last word. Thus, love for and assiduous use of the Bible in daily life is often an identifying mark of Baptists, which makes authority not only doctrinal but experiential - that is, related to life. Although more attention is given to the New Testament (Hebrews 1:1&2), the authority of the Old Testament is acknowledged (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Reverence for Scripture also demands recognition of the authority of the Holy Spirit, who inspired it. Word and Spirit belong together. One without the other is a distortion of truth, and the bond between them is seen by Baptists as key to the functional authority of Christ in his church.

The fourth and final emphasis among Baptists is the church's role as a vehicle of authority. The presence of Christ makes the "gathered community" unique: a society within which God's authority is transmitted and expressed by the Spirit through Scripture. Such a high view of the Church must not be understood in an exclusive sense. Authority may be expressed through appointed offices but is not confined to them. Among Baptists, the mind of Christ is sought through the prayerful submission of the individual to the community which seeks the will of the Spirit through Scripture. The commanding impulse is personal but never private. Liberty of conscience, a vital plan in Baptist doctrine, is never meant to imply privatized religion.

What are the ideal forms of authority? What are the tests by which Baptists both recognize and exercise authority? Christ's pattern of holiness, self-giving ministry, power and love is the litmus. Moral persuasion rather than legal or institutional demands compels the obedience of Baptists. The absence of love and holiness and self-giving quickly produces centrifugal tendencies.

To understand Baptists requires a clear view of the function of authority in Baptist life and how it relates to freedom. Freedom is essential in Baptist thought, but often it is in tension with obedience. For that reason the notion that freedom and obedience are both elements of authority is vital. The New Testament presumes their reconciliation by proclaiming them in a paradoxical fashion. Paul is equally ready to call himself a *doulos* (slave of Christ) and at the same time extol his freedom in Christ (Galatians 1:10 with 5:1). But what is experientially true for the individual is not so easily grasped in the interpersonal relationships of a congregation. Freedom is often the first casualty of social cohesion.

In common with much of modern society generally, Baptists face prejudice against authority caused by individualism, preoccupation with freedom, the difficulty of relating liberty and obedience, and a general reaction to authoritarianism. To illustrate: liberty of conscience is sometimes misconstrued as freedom from the church rather than freedom in the church. And a secular democratic approach to the congregational principle produces the doctrine of "the voice of the people is the voice of God" which is clearly not a New Testament basis for authority.

If people are to do their duty, they must be free in order for the moral response to be genuine. Members of John Smyth's first congregation in Gainsborough glimpsed this truth in the covenant "to walk as the Lord's *free* people." Among Baptists, submission to spiritual authority is, ideally at any rate, the voluntary and free response of obedience to the compulsion of love. The fusion of freedom and obedience by love produces a cohesive moral power which marks the Church as a society which is *sui generis*.

Convergences and Divergences on Authority

Convergence

1. Baptists and Mennonites affirm:
 - a) the Scripture as God's written word, while emphasizing the New Testament as the guide for faith and life;
 - b) the ultimate authority of the Christ of Scripture;
 - c) the Holy Spirit as the one who gives life to Scripture and is the continuing presence of Christ in his people;
 - d) "the gathered congregation" as primary locus of discernment and decision making.
2. Baptists and Mennonites are non-creedal.

3. Baptists and Mennonites have felt the impact of modern scientific and intellectual developments which have created tensions and fragmentation.

Divergences

1. Mennonites have tended to appeal to the Jesus of the Synoptics and particularly the Sermon on the Mount whereas Baptists have tended to appeal to Johannine and Pauline sources.
2. Baptists tend to emphasize "orthodoxy" (right belief as related to Scripture and confessions of faith) whereas Mennonites tend to emphasize "orthopraxy" (right practice as faithful discipleship).
3. Baptists are concerned about "soul freedom" and individual accountability before God whereas Mennonites are concerned about accountability to God through community.

CHURCH

Christian debates concerning the nature of the Church have focused on various issues through the centuries. In the fourth/fifth century, Augustine articulated a concept which strongly asserted the invisibility of the true Church based on his concept of election and predestination. This resulted in a territorially defined church in which church and state were closely allied in seeking to create a *corpus christianum*. Although this point of view continued to be held into the modern era by many Christians, increasingly in the West churches became disestablished or separated from the state. The "free churches" and "believers' churches," including both the Baptist and the Mennonites, were significant forces in bringing about such changes. However, many other issues were of vital concern to these churches - questions concerning the nature of church government and the autonomy of the local church, the nature of the sacraments, the role

of church discipline, the nature of worship, and the nature of Christian community. While there is diversity on all of these issues within both the Baptist and Mennonite traditions, there are elements which they tend to hold in common and which distinguish them from other church traditions. Other teachings and practices tend to distinguish Baptists and Mennonites from each other.

Mennonite Perspectives on the Church

When Mennonites set out to describe the nature of the Church, they turn to two major sources: the New Testament and sixteenth-century Anabaptism. From the New Testament they draw on three images in particular; the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10); the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16); and the community of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12).

From the sixteenth-century Anabaptists comes the description of the Church as a believers' church, a body of believers who enter the Church by baptism upon their voluntary confession of faith. It is not an institution but a fellowship of truly converted believers in Christ, committed to following him in full obedience as Lord. Although there was diversity among Anabaptists who emerged in different places, those groups that survived past the 1560s were those that were peaceful, missionary, willing to suffer, and sought to shape their lives together according to the New Testament Church. Menno Simons, who gave organizational shape and doctrinal clarity to the Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands, listed six marks of the true Church: 1) unadulterated pure doctrine; 2) Scriptural use of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; 3) obedience to the Word of God; 4) unfeigned brotherly love; 5) candid confession of God and Christ; 6) persecution for the sake of the Word of the Lord.

According to the historic confessions of the faith, Mennonite understandings of the nature of the Church induce the following particular emphases.

First, church membership is based on a voluntary confession of faith followed by believers' baptism as the point of entrance into church

membership. True repentance and faith is to be demonstrated by a life of purity and obedience to Jesus Christ, obeying his teachings and following his example.

Contemporary Mennonites practice believers' baptism, some by sprinkling or pouring, and some by immersion. In North America the age of baptism has tended to shift from early adulthood to adolescence or sometimes even to childhood (age six and upward). While most Mennonite congregations require believers' baptism, for prospective members who have been baptized as infants, some congregations in recent decades have simply accepted their letters of transfer from other denominations upon evidence that the candidates have been walking with the Lord as adult believers. Occasionally a person who has been converted outside any congregation requests baptism without joining a congregation, but Mennonites generally refuse to separate baptism from church membership.

Secondly, Mennonites follow a congregational polity rather than an episcopal or presbyterian polity. From the beginning Anabaptists and Mennonites have been strongly congregational. Yet none would deny that the local congregation needs the fellowship, counsel, and support of the wider Church in order to be faithful. There were synodal tendencies in the sixteenth and seventeenth century meetings of church leaders to discuss faith and practice and to prepare confessional statements. Organization into district and national conferences began in the nineteenth century and is typical today except in some Old Order groups. However, individual congregations may have different degrees of relationship to the district conferences and the denomination. Although Mennonites often cooperate with congregations of other denominations or with ministerial councils on the local level, they have been very cautious about larger ecumenical groups, and cooperation with other denominational bodies has tended to be on specific projects.

A common pattern of ministry in the nineteenth century was for local congregations to call and ordain from among their own members deacons,

preachers, and supervising bishops or leaders, who might oversee groups of congregations. This pattern has not been widely adopted by mission churches, and increasingly in Europe and North America, the pattern has been a single trained, salaried, and mobile pastor cooperating with an elected board of deacons or elders. No human being - pastor, bishop or moderator - is considered to be the head of the Church. All stand under the authority of Jesus Christ, who is the head of the body.

Thirdly, the issue of church discipline has been of crucial importance to Mennonites. Historically, Mennonites have tried to follow Matthew 18:15-22, with its stages of counsel, confrontation, reconciliation and forgiveness or, finally, separation in dealing with members who were not living lives worthy of the Lord. Even in the sixteenth century there were differences of opinion on excommunication and the ban. In recent decades individualism has eroded the practice of church discipline. The principle of accountability to the community in maintaining a lifestyle that is faithful to Christ is now more often called discipling than disciplining, and the preferred methods are teaching, counsel, and spiritual formation.

Traditionally, an important element of discipleship for Anabaptists and Mennonites has been the life of simplicity. This has served as a distinctive sign of rejecting worldly fashions, ostentation, and among some groups, even modern technology. Among contemporary Mennonites, simple living is most often seen as a means of conserving the earth's resources and of economic sharing.

Contemporary emphasis is less on congregational discipline than on congregational fellowship and mutual support. Gatherings for worship and Bible study are warm social occasions, supplemented by fellowship meals and a variety of activities for all ages. Additional fellowship is experienced as part of district and denominational conference gatherings.

Fourthly, suffering for the sake of Christ has been a frequent experience of Mennonites and has often been understood as an integral aspect of their

understanding of the Church. Anabaptists and Mennonites have seen suffering and persecution as the Cross commanded by Jesus: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their Cross and follow me." (Mark 8:24). The martyrdom of many Anabaptists and their faithfulness under persecution continues to be a powerful influence on present-day Mennonite identity, as evidenced by the continued use of the *Martyrs' Mirror* stories. Although most Mennonites today do not suffer for their faith in Christ, they often teach that in loving one's enemies one chooses to absorb suffering rather than to inflict it or even to assert one's own rights aggressively. Particularly in wartime, Mennonites' historic nonresistant stance has led to difficulties with governments which lack provision for conscientious objectors and has evoked hostility from neighbours. Mennonites of the former USSR frequently suffered persecution, and more recently Mennonites in China, Central America and Ethiopia have undergone severe suffering. At the same time, these churches have experienced phenomenal growth, underscoring again that the martyr church is both a suffering and a witnessing church.

Finally, the nature and understanding of worship including the faithful observance of the ordinances as commanded by Jesus Christ is also distinctive among Mennonites. Mennonite worship is usually neither liturgical (emphasizing the glory and transcendence of God) nor charismatic (emphasizing the presence of the Holy Spirit). Mennonite worship focuses most distinctly on Jesus Christ as Lord. The reading and preaching of the written Word are central to the worship, and they testify to Jesus as the incarnate Word. Earnestness about following Christ rather than exuberant joy characterizes the mood and ethos of a traditional Mennonite service, although the style of worship varies from one congregation or culture to another. Congregational singing is a beautiful, meaningful, and emotional part of Mennonite worship, and prayer is an essential element of the worship. A freewill offering is also a typical way for a congregation to express a response to God in worship. Both the worship service itself and the meeting house are typically characterized by simplicity, with sparing use of visual symbols and rejection of ostentation. The number of women

pastors and church leaders is rapidly increasing in North America, Europe, and in some other parts of the world.

From the beginning Anabaptists and Mennonites have spoken of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as signs and symbols of the grace of God rather than sacramental channels or re-enactments of that grace. As a person responds in faith and obedience to God's free offer of grace and forgiveness, God's grace becomes effective in that person's life. The believer then gives public witness to that inner reality by requesting believer's baptism.

With respect to the Lord's Supper, the foundational documents of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition offer three ways of expressing its meaning: 1) the bread and wine are signs pointing to the broken body and shed blood of Christ who died for our sins, 2) the Lord's Supper is a memorial meal to remind us of what Christ has done for us in His suffering and death, 3) the Lord's Supper is a union and communion with Christ and with the members of His body. Therefore most Mennonite groups practice open communion, inviting all professing believers to share the Lord's Supper. Contemporary Mennonite meditations on the Lord's Supper sometimes also call Christ's followers to a willingness to be broken and poured out for others as Christ gave his life for us.

Baptist Perspectives on the Church

Emerging in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Baptists were indebted to Puritans, Separatists, and Anabaptists as they defined their view of the Church. Arguably more dependent upon English writers, Baptists started with the proposition that "the true church is composed of true believers." This early understanding of General Baptists reflects their antagonism to parish systems, prayer books, and hierarchies. Baptists preferred to apply the term "church" to congregations rather than to structures or organizations.

Later Calvinistic Baptists also emphasized the particularity of local congregations. Such bodies, called into being by God's Spirit, "have all the

means to their salvation," and as the first London Confession put it in 1644, "all power and authority ... in any way needful." In the dynamic, then, of small, intimate congregations, the true Church took shape.

Baptists of all persuasions have stressed the concept of a voluntary church. This means that one enters the fellowship by a voluntary commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and that new members covenant with each other to "walk in the ways of Christ as revealed in Scripture." The congregation, moreover, voluntarily makes decisions about its own life and relationships with other Christians. Important to early Baptists was the principle that offerings in support of church and ministry were to be completely voluntary.

Important in the Baptist concept of a "voluntary church" are the covenant and confession of faith. The Baptist use of covenants modified the Separatist form: following the experience of believer's baptism, members of the fellowship voluntarily created covenants. These agreements stated membership expectations between members and benefits enjoyed by God's people from God's faithfulness. The written covenant helped to build a bond among members and gave shape to the body politic of the church. In contrast, confessions of faith were created first by individuals, later by congregations, to be theological statements of consensus, modified from time to time within congregations. Standard covenant and confessional forms gradually emerged among many Baptist congregations and later associational bodies, some with anachronistic elements. In the twentieth century, many Baptist bodies have used confessions of faith as doctrinal standards for theological clarity and as bases for fellowship.

Since the late nineteenth century, Baptists have also used the word "autonomy" and "interdependence" to describe their doctrine of the Church. By autonomy, Baptists mean the authority under Christ to make all decisions at the congregational level, without interference from other ecclesiastical or civil authorities. Because this emphasis has too often led to schism and isolationism, mainstream Baptists have also taught and practiced interdependence. This has been realized in the shape of

associations, conventions, unions, societies, and other ecumenical bodies to advance the cause of Christ. For most Baptists, the terms "autonomy" and "interdependence" are used in dynamic tension.

The task of the Church is also inherent in the Baptist doctrine of the Church. Local congregations are to receive new members and nurture them in faith and godliness. The church is to be an evangelizing community, always witnessing to the love and reconciliation of God in Christ. Finally, the church has a direct responsibility to be a worshipping community. This includes prayer, stewardship, proclamation of the word, exhortation, singing, and celebration of the ordinances/sacraments.

Baptist worship has been characterized by a wide variety of forms and practices. Many congregations in the British and North American cultures follow less formal patterns in which the sermon is a high priority. Choirs, hymns, and gospel songs bring additional life to the principal weekly worship service. In the African-American Baptist tradition, emphasis is placed upon musical expression and personal, vivid response to prayer, exhortation, and preaching. Among many Baptist groups, a primary focus is evangelism. Thus, an invitation to Christian discipleship follows an evangelistic sermon. A minority of Baptists prefer more formal worship where modifications of the Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed patterns are practiced. The ordinances provide important punctuation in the worship life of Baptists, regardless of the sub-category or cultural context.

Baptists approach Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the theological contexts of the seventeenth century. Early on, there was a debate about whether these rites were sacramental or important teachings of Christ. Many followed the examples of John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli, in teaching that both were sacramental, though perhaps not fully "sacraments." In order to distinguish themselves from other English churches and to restore a simple New Testament understanding, most Baptist congregations adopted the terminology of "ordinance." Generally, the ordinances are two, but in North America footwashing, anointing with oil, and the laying on of hands, have also at times been considered ordinances.

Baptism replaced the covenant as a sign of the Church for Baptists. Baptism pointed to a common experience rather than mere intellectual assent, and it was required of all true and able believers at the time of entry in the Church. By the mid-seventeenth century, after conferring with a Dutch Rhynsburger congregation which included Mennonites, English Baptists adopted believers' baptism by immersion as the common mode. Immersion portrayed not only obedience to Christ, but a dying and rising with Christ (Romans 6:1-4). Thus it was a powerful witness for new believers and a renewal experience for existing members. Baptists do expect that members will want to follow Christ in the ordinance of believers' baptism by immersion, and they have written more on the topic than any other subject.

For most Baptists, the Lord's Supper is a periodic reenactment of the Last Supper in the Pauline tradition of Scripture. It is a "memorial feast" open to all true believers, particularly those who are members of the celebrating congregation. Open communion, or the allowance of persons who are not members of the congregation or those who profess faith through another denominational tradition, has become increasingly widespread in the last few decades. Generally, Baptists use simple bread and grape juice for the elements, in which the stress is upon the broken body and shed blood of Christ for the remission of sins. Much debate occurred in the North American context over the use of fermented wine or grape juice, illustrating a cultural impact upon theological issues.

Convergences and Divergences on the Church

Convergences

1. Baptists and Mennonites affirm:
 - a) the believers' church as a free church, a voluntary body of believers baptized upon confession of faith;
 - b) the local congregation (i.e., a gathered community) as the primary expression of the Church;

- c) the interdependence of congregations in associations and conferences;
 - d) a cautious concern for cooperative Christianity beyond denominational boundaries;
 - e) the importance of a strong and warm community life.
2. Baptists and Mennonites practice believers' baptism which is regarded as the sign and symbol of a person's response in faith and obedience to God's free offer of grace and forgiveness in Christ. Baptism is expected of believers and is generally viewed as entry into church membership and a commitment to follow Christ.
 3. Baptists and Mennonites celebrate the Lord's Supper primarily as a sign and symbol of Jesus' suffering and death and as an experience of union with Christ and one another, to be shared by professing believers.
 4. Baptists and Mennonites practice a simple worship style with the focus on Jesus Christ as Lord. The sermon is a central feature together with prayer, Scripture, and congregational singing.

Divergences

1. Historically Baptists have tended to understand Christ's death as a vicarious, substitutionary atonement for sin, whereas Mennonites have tended to emphasize Christ's death as a demonstration of God's suffering love, reconciling the world to himself.
2. Baptists emphasize personal salvation whereas Mennonites emphasize commitment to follow Christ in life.
3. Baptists view immersion as the proper mode of baptism to represent the believers' identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Mennonites practice several modes of baptism.

4. Mennonites often see suffering as a mark of the true Church whereas Baptists do not.
5. Mennonites have been more concerned about issues of church discipline than Baptists have been.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

The people of faith have always struggled with the questions of how they as a people called by God are to relate to the larger world - its environment, its people, its social institutions. This task has been especially high on the list of concerns of the people known as Baptists and Mennonites. Both communities understand that in important ways to be Christian is to be called out and to be different. The kind of relationships between the Church and the world that these two traditions have fostered demonstrate much about their understanding of the nature of God's sovereignty, the nature of Christ's life and ministry, and understanding of human nature, and the nature of sin and human need. In this portion of our conversation, much is revealed about how Mennonites and Baptists understand themselves and some critical points at which we share and points at which we differ.

Mennonite Perspectives on the Mission of the Church in the World

Mission

Together with other Christians, Mennonites confess that Jesus Christ is the sole means of salvation and the norm for faith and life in all cultures. They also affirm that witness for Jesus Christ in both word and deed is an essential dimension of the Church's life and its reason for being. For Mennonites, the mission of the Church includes both the commission to make disciples - "teaching them all that I have commanded you" - and ministries of compassion and service.

Many early Anabaptists and Mennonites were aggressively missionary and witnessed boldly regardless of the consequences, which were very severe as the *Martyr's Mirror* attests so vividly. Many persons were added to the Church. Menno Simons became a fugitive in danger of his life during his entire ministry as he went about preaching, baptizing and building up the church. Persecution took its toll and the Mennonites became more withdrawn as they sought to survive.

In the past century, however, Mennonites have been caught up in the modern missionary movement. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Mennonites in the Netherlands and Russia who had been influenced by the Pietist tradition were the first Mennonites to support the modern mission movement. In both the Netherlands and Russia, Mennonites supported the Baptist foreign mission endeavors before sending out their own missionaries or establishing their own mission programs. In 1847, the Dutch organized the Mennonite Association for the Spread of the Gospel in the Dutch Colonies, which was preceded by the Dutch Section of the (English) Baptist Missionary Society (1821-47), which also consisted mostly of Mennonites. The Dutch organization was supported significantly by Russian and German Mennonites. When they established their own mission programs, the Dutch went first to Java in Indonesia. The General Conference Mennonites in America began extensive work among the American Indians following 1880. The General Conference Mennonites, the Mennonite Church, and the Mennonite Brethren Church all began their foreign mission programs in India in 1899 in response to famine conditions.

An important feature of the Mennonite mission today is the work of the Mennonite Central Committee, a North American organization begun in 1920 to help their fellow religionists who were suffering in the Soviet Union. It developed into a relief service agency which sends volunteers to many parts of both North America and the rest of the world to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and bind up wounds in the name of Christ. In recent years two new emphases have emerged in response to a growing sensitivity to the causes of the human misery to which MWC has ministered. They are development and concern for justice for the oppressed.

Initially, Mennonites in the modern period did not have a strategy for mission. They borrowed their approach to mission from Protestant programs. In more recent years the MCC has frequently opened the way into new areas for mission. The service base of these projects has aided in the *contextualization* of these missions, in giving recognition to the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical position of the people among whom the witness takes place. Contextualization has been applied to structures, worship, and ritual, as well as a theology which centers on the incarnation of Jesus Christ. At the same time, Mennonites have emphasized simplicity of life, both as a distinctive mark of discipleship (including non-conformity in the face of affluence or waste) and as a mean of conserving the earth's resources and of economic sharing.

The mission approach of Mennonites has been particularly well adapted to serving non-Western Christian groups that have already accepted the Christian message - together with an emphasis on peace - but who desire assistance with Bible study and who wish to understand more adequately the relationship of faith to daily life.

Peace

Mennonites are one of the historic peace churches and most Mennonites view peace and nonresistance as a fundamental dimension of the gospel. Mennonite's understanding of peace is based on their reading of the New Testament, and particularly of Matthew 5:38-48 in the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus tells his follower not to resist the one who is evil, but rather to turn the other cheek, to go the second mile, and to love their enemies. Earlier in the chapter He says, "Blessed are the peacemakers" and calls them children of God.

Mennonite confessions have been remarkably consistent in including an article on peace. Practice has been far less uniform. Several major migrations were directly related to reluctance to participate in military service: from Prussia to Russia ca. 1790 to 1820; to Canada and the United States from Alsace between 1830 and 1870; and from Russia following 1870. Mennonites remaining in Europe following these migrations often

accepted participation in compulsory military service, although an alternative service program existed in Russia for a time. In Canada and the United States young Mennonite men were generally granted the status of conscientious objectors, fulfilling the obligation to the state by payment of fines or alternative service.

Voluntary service and relief programs have provided opportunities for serving humankind, especially following World War I (France, the Middle East, Russia) and World War II (primarily Europe), and currently in the Third World. PAX, one of the alternative service options included in the I-W program which functioned from 1952 to 1973 in the U.S., made it possible for many conscientious objectors to render their service abroad. In recent years a number of European countries have legally recognized conscientious objectors and have instituted alternative service programs.

A significant number of Mennonite men have chosen various forms of military service. A survey in the 1980s indicates that 69 percent of young men in North America said they would take the position of conscientious objection if drafted.

Mennonite peace literature prior to World War II was minimal. In 1944 the publication of Guy F. Hershberger's *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* presented the biblical rationale for peace. It considered both Old and New Testament foundations. The book was widely accepted by North American Mennonite groups. Since that time a vast amount of Mennonite literature has been published on peace and justice concerns. From 1950 to 1980, as Mennonites became significantly acculturated, peace often became a focus of identity. The theological base has been expanded with further reflection on the meaning and implications of the lordship of Christ, the Christian witness to the state and sociopolitical responsibility, together with an emphasis on "shalom" and peace- and justice-making. This includes a new concern for reconciliation that embraces all of creation because the violence against creation is of the same order as the violence in human society.

Politics

Mennonites affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation and human life; they also affirm the separation of the Church from the political order and, hence, the freedom of the Church from the dominion of the state. Mennonites have generally viewed participation in the political order with skepticism.

The first Anabaptist confession or positional statement, formulated at Schleitheim on the German-Swiss border in 1527, takes a strong position concerning separation from the world, and contains a lengthy article on the sword. Its main thrust is that a Christian may not serve as a magistrate. The argument is based on the example and teaching of Jesus and is taken directly from the Gospels. Menno Simons, leader of the Dutch Anabaptists, took a less stringent position on participation in government. In fact, Mennonites of Swiss and Dutch origins have differed more significantly in their relation to the political order than in any other expression of their faith. In the twentieth century, Mennonites have become increasingly aware of social issues, and of the need and the possibilities of changing unjust social structures.

Mennonites of Swiss origin continue to adhere to a remarkable degree to the early Swiss position of not holding political office. Mennonites and Amish, however, early voted in political elections in Pennsylvania, particularly before 1750. As early as the French and Indian War they also sent petitions to the government of Pennsylvania. In the twentieth century several persons have served in political office on the state level. More frequently, persons hold township-level offices where the use of force is not required.

Mennonites originating in the Dutch stream, on the other hand, have actively participated in government office-holding. Mennonites in the Netherlands early experienced toleration and participated somewhat in political affairs. In Russia, Mennonites were responsible for the political structures governing their communities, and in time those structures

intermingled somewhat with those of the Russian government. Several also became representatives in the Duma, the Russian parliament. In the United States and Canada, the Mennonite Brethren Church discouraged active political participation for its members until about 1950. Members of the General Conference Mennonite Church have been the most active politically. Recently Mennonites have held various governmental offices in the five western provinces of Canada and have also been members of Parliament in Ottawa.

In the 1950s and 60s, the appropriateness of a Christian witness to the state became the subject of international discussion between Mennonites and mainline Christians, primarily in Europe, but also in America. Political activism on the part of American Mennonites has been significant, especially since the establishment of an office in Washington, D.C. in 1968. An MCC office has also been established in Ottawa. Many of these concerns expressed to government have grown out of social injustices witnessed in countries where Mennonites have engaged in relief work. Frequently these injustices were perceived to be associated with U.S. foreign policy. In connection with this issue, it must also be said that Mennonites in general tend to reject national patriotic concerns to the extent that they are regarded as nationalistic.

Baptist Perspectives on the Mission of the Church in the World

Although there have been a few exceptions, Baptists generally have defined a primary task of the Church as evangelism and missions. The numerical and geographical expansion of the church has been the primary standard by which the vitality and authenticity of any Christian group has been measured. Prominent among Baptists and, indeed, evident to the entire Church and world have been Baptist leaders in missions and evangelism such as William Carey, Anne and Adoniram Judson, Lottie Moon and Billy Graham.

This emphasis on missions and evangelism has led to the establishment of systems and structures to accomplish these purposes. Often the mission board and evangelism department of a Baptist Convention or Union will receive the majority of the attention and support from the churches. These mission efforts frequently have been the most unifying element in Baptist life. Considerable attention is given to techniques and procedures that are designed to achieve the greatest results. Missionaries and evangelists are carefully trained in programs of outreach. Often these programs are very structured and detailed in spelling out the steps to be taken in achieving the greatest positive response to the mission efforts. All of these features demonstrate the centrality of missions and evangelism among Baptists.

There have been and continue to be differences among Baptists regarding their understanding of different dimensions of the mission effort. For example, various motives for doing missions receive differing emphases among Baptists. Some respond to the commandment of the Great Commission to go and proclaim the gospel to all corners of the world. Others are driven by the power of their own Christian experience to share with others the hope and joy that they have found in Christ. Still others are drawn primarily by the tragic dimensions of the human condition to go and be servants to those in need. Of course these different motives need not be mutually exclusive but usually one of them will be dominant.

There are differences in styles of missions among various Baptists. Within the modern missions movement there have been some mission efforts that make a sharp distinction between the "sending" churches and the "receiving" churches. In these mission efforts the "sending" churches exercise a careful control over the programs and personnel of the mission effort. Care is taken that missionaries not lose their cultural identity and become too closely identified with the culture of the mission field.

A contrasting style has tended to encourage the development of indigenous churches that incarnate the Christian faith into the cultural body of the mission field. Here the emphasis is on the development of indigenous leadership within the church and on phasing out the leadership role of

the missionary. Indeed this approach to mission tries to eliminate the distinction between the "sending" and the "receiving" churches and to establish a relationship in which churches from different cultures learn from each other.

Also, there have been different understandings of the substance of the mission effort. One approach has put emphasis upon meeting the spiritual needs of the lost. The primary purpose of missions is to bring the lost to a sense of their sins and an understanding of God's forgiving love that redeems them from sin. This approach usually emphasizes the personal and individual nature of the religious experience.

Others have focused upon a broader range of human needs and understand a broader range of divine acts in meeting those needs. The Christian experience is not only forgiveness but also, most importantly, regeneration and sanctification in which the total life is transformed. The mission effort challenges the social injustices that oppress people. Christ is understood as the suffering servant who identifies with the outcast of the world and comes to meet their social, economic, and physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.

A belief in a righteous (i.e., moral) God whose kingdom or reign extends into all areas of human experience has led Baptists to define broadly the task of the Church. Walter Rauschenbusch has influenced Baptists to understand more fully the social implications of the Gospel. A variety of social service institutions have been established to meet this wide range of human needs. Some examples of such institutions include orphanages, hospitals, counseling centers, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and schools.

In addition to such service organizations, many Baptist unions and conventions have established agencies to provide leadership for the churches and their members in analyzing and responding to major social problems. Attention has been given to sexual behaviour and family life. The importance of the family as a God-ordained institution has been stressed and recommendations have been made as to how the family can

be protected from many of the threats to its stability. In recent years much attention has been given to the expanding role of women within the family, the church, the other social institutions.

In considering economic issues Baptists have focused on the Christian doctrine of vocation and its meaning for the work life in all professions and occupations. Much attention and activity has been committed to the problems of hunger and poverty, both domestically and globally. This task has focused attention on different economic structures and systems and upon the disparity of wealth that exists in today's world.

Baptists have struggled with the sins of racism and ethnic conflict. The attempt has been to understand the importance of ethnic identity and to avoid those forms of pride and discrimination that deny God's equal love for all of the human family and to eliminate social patterns that oppress people and deny them complete access to the blessings of a full life.

In recent years the advances in medical technology have shifted attention to such issues as abortion, euthanasia, reproductive technology and the justice of various systems of health care distribution. There has not been widespread agreement among Baptists on a number of these ethical issues in health care.

A wide variety of positions on Christian involvement in the political process can be found in Baptist history and contemporary life. Some have sought to withdraw as much as possible from the political process. This abandonment of politics usually has grown out of an experience of persecution in which the state has become a mortal enemy or out of an eschatological expectation that views the orders of this world as under the dominion of Satan.

A second position of some Baptists involves cautious and limited political involvement. The church must maintain its integrity and not become indebted to or under the control of the state. Religious liberty for all and the separation of church and state are stressed in this tradition.

A third position calls for a wider range of efforts by the church to work with and through the state to transform society. While carefully avoiding any merger of church and state in which either would be under the essential control of the other, these Baptists advocate an active role of the church in the political process whenever possible.

A fourth position, referred to historically as the theocratic view, sees the government under the sovereignty of God and, therefore, properly directed by Christians to enforce God's will on earth.

Unlike Mennonites, the issue of peace has not been a defining issue for Baptists. Like many other Christian traditions there have been those who have advocated non-violence as the proper social strategy for Christians. In recent Baptist life this position has been advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr. and by several Baptist peace fellowships in different regions of the world.

Most Baptists can be identified with the just war tradition which accepts the tragic necessity of the use of force to maintain order within a sinful world. Baptists generally have been active in supporting their governments by serving in the military as combatants and chaplains or working in defense industries. There are also examples of Baptists who, under the influence of nationalistic fervor, have moved into essentially a holy war mode and promoted warfare as a divine cause.

Convergences and Divergences on the Mission of the Church in the World

Convergences

1. Baptists and Mennonites affirm:
 - a) the Lordship of Christ over Creation and human life;

- b) Jesus Christ as the sole means of salvation and the norm for faith and life in all cultures;
 - c) witness for Jesus Christ in both word and deed as an essential dimension of the Church's life;
 - d) that the church must be free, i.e. neither the church nor the state is to dominate the other (separation of church and state).
2. Both Baptists and Mennonites have strong overseas missions programs resulting in vigorous indigenous churches in many nations.

Divergences

1. Baptist identity is shaped more by concern for proclamation, whereas Mennonite identity is shaped more by service.
2. Mennonites are one of the historic peace churches and most Mennonites see peace and nonresistance as a fundamental aspect of the gospel, whereas Baptists generally identify with the just war tradition.
3. Baptists generally affirm participation in the political order, whereas Mennonites tend to view it with skepticism.
4. Whereas Baptists are often sympathetic to national patriotic concerns, Mennonites tend to reject those concerns as nationalistic.
5. Mennonites often have viewed suffering as a mark of faithfulness.
6. Mennonites have emphasized simplicity of life, both as a distinctive mark of rejecting worldly fashions and as a means of conserving the earth's resources and of economic sharing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. that the BWA and MWC invite each other to participate regularly through official representatives at their world congresses and, as appropriate, at their general council meetings;
2. that the leaders and staff of the BWA and MWC regularly seek each other's advice and support on matters of mutual concern;
3. that the BWA and MWC encourage member bodies within the same country to exchange official representatives at their national meetings or assemblies;
4. that the BWA and MWC encourage several member bodies to convene (perhaps through mission agencies or educational institutions) a Baptist-Mennonite consultation on the "mission and peace witness of the Church" (or "peace evangelism");
5. that the BWA and MWC encourage several member bodies to convene a Baptist-Mennonite consultation on themes of just war, responsible use of coercive power, non-violent resistance, and biblical pacifism;
6. that the BWA and MWC encourage cooperation in mission, service, and peace and justice projects at all levels;
7. that the BWA and MWC encourage exchanges at various levels, including cross-congregational fellowship, pulpit exchanges, academic exchanges of both students and faculty, and national and international youth conferences;
8. that the BWA and MWC encourage continued research into the 1608-1640 period of Baptist-Mennonite intersection with a view of mutual sharing and publication;

Report on Conversations

9. that the BWA and MWC review Baptist-Mennonite relationships by 1999;
10. that this report be distributed as widely as possible among the member churches of the BWA and MWC;
11. that upon approval of these recommendations by the General Councils of the BWA and of the MWC, the General Secretaries of both global bodies meet to discuss and plan implementation of these recommendations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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