

A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren by John H. Redekop

John Redekop, Professor of Political Science at Wilfred Laurier University (Waterloo, Ontario) is a very active MB layman. He has recently completed tenures both as Moderator of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and as a member of the Board of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (Fresno). He has also served on the National Council of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Though his book, *A People Apart*, has sparked controversy, he speaks as a responsible "insider" and as one who intends to remain faithful to Anabaptist and Evangelical theology while retaining continuous gratitude for the best of "Mennonite culture."

Redekop begins his book with the statement that MBs face three serious problems: our theology is being diluted, our church polity is eroding and our ethnicity (which can, and once did, sustain and express our faith) now confuses our witness to others, hinders our acceptance of non-ethnics, and exacerbates our polity and doctrinal problems. He focuses his book on the third problem.

The first two chapters introduce the topic and list the "basic questions" and "key assumptions" for his study. On pages 19-20 he lists twelve hypotheses that he believes are validated by the research presented in chapters 3-5. I will organize my review around these Hypotheses-become-Conclusions (hereafter "H/C").

In H/C 1-5 Redekop argues that Mennonites generally and MBs specifically are now (and will continue to be) thought of as an ethno-religious group by those who do not belong to it. The data on this in chapter 3 is derived from nearly 1700 questionnaires that were completed by MBs (ethnic and non-ethnic) as well as by non-MBs and non-Mennonites. He also concludes that the vast majority of MB respondents believe that this constitutes a problem for MB churches.

Redekop claims that the ethnic component of the Mennonite mix appears to be increasingly overshadowing the religious component in the minds of most people. Reasons for this become evident in a lengthy "scrapbook" (chapter 4), revealing the cultural reality that the media presents as "Mennonite." The impressive list of "scraps" range from images of the Amish to relief sales and from museums to a "Mennonite cabaret." The conclusion is that Mennonites are a cultural reality and are seen as such. Chapter 5 presents items and arguments that MBs are also ethnic and are perceived in that way.

For me and, I suspect, for most readers of the *Bulletin*, this scrapbook will be more interesting and persuasive than the survey. Most of us are probably unaware of the extent to which the Mennonites of Canada (especially in Manitoba and Ontario) are a vigorous and proud subculture. Readers here will be surprised—and may be as shocked as is Redekop—that non-religious heirs of the tradition continue to claim it and that at least one "Mennonite writer" speaks "as" a Mennonite and "for" Mennonites though publicly insisting that he isn't any sort of Christian at all.

Readers are therefore prepared to agree with Redekop's H/C 6-8 that this religious and cultural mix is confusing and that naming both these aspects "Mennonite" becomes contradictory. Audiences in the USA and the West Coast will be reminded that such a mix often results in "in-group" attitudes that can freeze out the non-ethnic.

The most provoking part of Redekop's proposals for his intended Canadian audience has been his insistence (H/C 9-10) that an official change of name is necessary in order to sort out the confusions he has described. By not calling our churchly and religious reality "Mennonite," we could work at clarifying the problems we are having with theology, polity and evangelism. He returns to this theme all through the book and especially in chapters 8-9.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Redekop's proposals is summarized in H/C 11-12 (chapters 7-8). Here he argues that a name change could allow MBs to be *more Anabaptist* by explicitly hinging our doctrine of church, discipleship and nonresistance to their biblical sources. At the same time, those born to our ethnicity (and the few who wish to assimilate to it) would be free to be *more Mennonite* in their non-churchly life. This would also free French, Black, Oriental, Hispanic and other MBs to celebrate their own ethnicity in analogous ways. Then in our churches we could together celebrate the common Evangelical and Anabaptist beliefs and worship that would unite us religiously.

Whether his proposals would do what he wants is debatable—as he acknowledges. In calling for a discussion of these issues, I think he has done us all a service. But the fruitfulness of that debate hinges on how we are to think of the relation between "faith" and "life." He comments on this in chapters 6-7. A much more thorough analysis needs to be done, I think, before we can know what to do with his proposals. Precisely these sorts of questions are to be raised at the symposium entitled "Faith and Ethnicity Among the Brethren" to be held November 19-21, 1987 at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California.

—Delbert Wiens

Historical Sources In Polish Archives and Libraries

For more than four centuries, Mennonites formed part of the cultural and religious landscape in regions along the Vistula River in Poland. It is therefore not surprising to find that archives and libraries in centers such as Gdansk (formerly Danzig), Malbork (once Marienburg) and Torun hold extensive collections of documents reflecting the life of the Mennonite community.

The library of the Academy of Sciences in Gdansk has a remarkable collection of manuscripts from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. One manuscript tells about the building of the first Mennonite church in Montau in 1586, well before this was permitted in most other parts of Poland. Another document records the action taken by King John Casimir to protect Mennonites from being forced to accept the quartering of troops in their homes.

Several documents describe meetings between Mennonite "Vermahner" and leaders of the established churches (Lutheran, Catholic or Calvinist). Although many of their views were similar, a number of distinct emphases became evident. When the Mennonites were asked about original sin, and whether children were born condemned, they replied that they did not recognize original sin. When they