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TWO MOMENTS IN THE SEARCH FOR A MENNONITE BRETHREN IDENTITY

Paul Toews

In 1886 on a midsummer Sunday evening, Johann Wieler visited Peter Martin Friesen to inform him that the Rueckenau, Russia, Mennonite Brethren congregation was commissioning Friesen to write a history of the first twenty-five years of the Mennonite Brethren Church (MBC). In order to assist Wieler gave Friesen some historical documents, authorized him to interview the older people, and presented him with fifty rubles to cover the research costs and reimburse him for his time.¹

Twenty-five years later, Raduga, the Mennonite publishing house in Halbstadt, published Friesen's great work, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruederschaft in Russland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte*. The twenty-five-year lag stood in sharp contrast to the comment of one member of the Rueckenau congregation who remarked when the decision was made, "That is a nice piece of work exactly suited for Friesen. But he will earn handsomely from it, for he will complete it in fourteen days!"²

The 1886 call for a history of the Brethren was repeated in 1951 when the Board of Reference and Counsel (the highest governing board of the denomination) urged the North American conference to authorize publication of four

*P.M. Friesen
and J.A. Toews:
Two Differing
Histories and
Identities for the
Mennonite
Brethren
Church.*

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denominational books, including a new history. This new call was fully completed twenty-four years later with the 1975 publication of John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*³

The needs of the fledgling Mennonite Brethren group in Russia in 1886 and those of the North American conference in 1951 were surely as different as the gap in time and place suggest. Yet, the two moments also shared a profound similarity. Both times were important moments in the Mennonite Brethren search for a historical identity. Equally revealing is the time lag in both instances between the realization that history could speak to the moment and the ability to fashion a usable historical interpretation. In both moments, the precariousness of a people's identity precluded the immediate writing of their history. And examining the context in which the two histories emerged is instructive for understanding the identity formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Mennonite Brethren Beginnings

The Mennonite Brethren were born in Russia in 1860; the same year that the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) emerged as a distinct denomination in the United States. What was happening in the nineteenth century in both Russia and the United States is clear. Modernity was creeping to the outer reaches of most Western societies, and peoples heretofore largely isolated were brought into greater contact with their respective host societies. The nineteenth century was a period of schisms in the Mennonite worlds of both Russia and the United States. The greater cultural contact brought into focus a series of new issues. Decisions were required about the preservation of inherited patterns that had been forged in relative isolation. Questions of what was to be normative, what was to be the pattern of isolation or integration into the dominant culture, what would preserve the best of the Mennonite traditions, were common to Mennonites in both countries.

The responses given were seldom equivocal. In American society, with its freer religious climate, schisms were easier to sustain and differentiation among Mennonites was more readily secured. What emerged was a spectrum of Mennonite groups from those seeking to remain on the fringes of society to those participating in the central institutions of North American society. There was a particularity to the groups that emerged in North America: Old Mennonites (MC), New Mennonites (GC), Old Order Amish, Progressive Amish, and numerous other well-defined groups. Each had a degree of internal coherence.

The Russian story was different. The agreements with the Russian

government regarding the pattern of settlement and the integrated nature of the Mennonite commonwealth meant that religious schism threatened both administrative authority and cultural solidarity. The political structures of Russia contained those schismatic tendencies which were inherent in an unstable religious environment. The *Kleine Gemeinde* of 1812 and the Mennonite Brethren of 1860 were the only two substantial divisions in Russian Mennonite history before the Russification policies, introduced in the 1870s, created new pressures.

Historiography of 1860

The writings of current historians about the Mennonite Brethren beginnings, while offering different interpretations, all point to a complex religious and social environment in mid-nineteenth-century Russia. The Ukraine was undergoing sweeping economic and political changes. These environmental changes were accompanied by an enlargement of the Mennonite intellectual landscape. The new religious ideas of the Moravians, Lutherans, Baptists, Pietists, and others gained entrance into the mid-nineteenth-century Russian Mennonite world.⁴

In 1860 divergent religious and cultural traditions operating throughout the Russian Mennonite world converged to create a new religious community. Cultural progressives seeking greater liberation from the constraints of a closed community, and cultural conservatives seeking a tighter morality worked together to fashion an alternative to the existing community. Some of the early Mennonite Brethren reached back into history—to Menno Simons—to shape a new ideal; others reached out beyond the boundaries of the existing community to the religious currents of neighboring traditions. Anabaptism, Pietism, and Evangelicalism were present and mediated reforming ideas and dispositions during the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Historians have weighed these relative influences differently. How they are weighed not only affects our understanding of the past but can also have ideological consequences for how we act in the present. Were the Mennonite Brethren born of Anabaptist, Pietist or Baptist influence? Was the birth of the Mennonite Brethren progressive or conservative, expansive or narrow, cosmopolitan or provincial? Was the hostility of the parent church to the emerging MBC excessive or not? And do differing answers to the question make any difference?⁵

P. M. Friesen and J. A. Toews are the two premier historians of the Mennonite Brethren story. Friesen, in 1911, established the interpretive framework that was largely followed until the publication of Toews's

history in 1975.⁶ Toews fashioned a very different interpretation. For both the interpretation of the beginnings became central to an understanding of the subsequent story and the appropriate role that the past could play for the church facing issues in their respective times. Both Friesen and Toews were trained in theology before coming to history. Their contributions to fashioning a "theology" for the Mennonite Brethren was to render an interpretation of the past.⁷

Peter Martin Friesen's History

One contemporary historian has suggested the Peter Martin Friesen's *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruederschaft in Russland (1789-1910)* belongs in the singular category of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings shared only by *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren* and the *Martyr's Mirror*⁸; they are the indispensable symbols of and guides to Anabaptist-Mennonite history. Friesen, like these other writers, preserved the documentary material that permitted the subsequent telling of the story. The upheaval and destruction of the Russian Mennonite world in the twentieth century, all too reminiscent of the fate of sixteenth-century Anabaptists and Hutterites, destroyed many of the records necessary to formulate an understanding of the history. Friesen, by publishing them in his massive history, preserved at least the rudiments necessary for historical reconstruction.

Peter Martin Friesen, born in the Ukraine in 1849, was educated in Switzerland, Odessa, and Moscow. From 1873 to 1886, he taught in the *Zentralschule* in Halbstadt. He spent most of the following years, until his death in 1914, in the non-Mennonite communities of Odessa, Sevastopol, and Moscow. Friesen joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1866 at age sixteen, was ordained as a minister in 1884, and subsequently became one of the church's leading theologians. He authored the 1902 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. Although he was intimately involved in the Russian Mennonite world, he was simultaneously on its boundary. His last twenty-eight years, lived largely in the context of other Russian peoples, helped to shape a perspective on his own smaller world. He brought to the writing of history the perspectives of both the insider and outsider: a viewpoint that was both separatist and ecumenical, laudatory and critical.⁹

Friesen's twenty-five-year effort to write the commemorative history of the Mennonite Brethren became much more. It is the definitive Russian interpretation of the entire northern European Mennonite story. Taking the events of 1860 as the centerpiece, Friesen ranged back to Menno Simons and forward to 1910.

Friesen brought to his task a high degree of self-consciousness about the problem of constructing a written narrative and interpretation of his people. The expressive lament in the introduction suggests the degree to which selectivity is always a problem for the historian, and the way that difficulty is compounded in constructing a narrative for a small and conflictual group: "Emotions and historical conscience came into severe conflict. Time and again I listened to dozens of honorable men and women from the various factions and read and reread their documents—and a great sorrow overcame me! I could impossibly present loving old men of this or that faction in all their nakedness in a cold-blooded fashion during their lifetime, a nakedness of which they had themselves been unaware."¹⁰

A Movement Drawing on New Sources

For Friesen, the Mennonite Brethren movement, while sharing a continuity with the larger Mennonite tradition, also clearly drew from new sources to fashion a necessary revitalization of Russian Mennonite society. He began with Menno Simons, then continued the Mennonite story from Holland through northern Europe, Prussia, and into South Russia. Yet "the good house of Menno had become practically desolate and empty and was about to collapse."¹¹ The history of "narrow interpretations, differences over small things, and numerous divisions," the triumph of "externally 'correct doctrine' and morality" over "true faith and its inevitable fruits of sanctification in most hearts . . . 'rationalism' and 'indifferentism'" was now arrested by the "brotherhood" piety of the Moravian Brethren, evangelical Pietists, and Hershutters.¹²

"Brotherhood" was a "warmhearted Christian fellowship, something that is now found in the Mennonite Brethren church as well as in all truly vital Christian circles. . ."¹³ This "vital air and warmth, food and drink brought into the impoverished house" and permitted renewal of the tradition "according to the old plan, on the old foundation." Just as Mennonitism was both a "critique and complement of Lutheranism," so Pietism "in its wholesome essence has . . . a harmonious effect on Mennonitism." Pietism in this interpretation was a necessary corrective. During the Reformation, Lutheranism and Anabaptism had seemed mutually exclusive, but in the end they had formed "a whole when balanced in an apostolic arrangement." Together they had purified the "impoverished Christianity of the West." By implication, this new union of Pietism and Mennonitism would purify not only the Russian Mennonite world, but extend itself far beyond those parochial boundaries.¹⁴

Friesen's Sympathy for Dissenters

A second element in Friesen's temperament that shaped both his work and understanding of Mennonite history was his sympathy for the rights of religious dissenters, whether Jews, Mennonites, or Russian Stundists. In his later years, he was an outspoken defender of the weak and oppressed, even to the point endangering his own political freedom. He resisted any form of state intrusion into religious practice. He was concerned that Mennonites clearly differentiate between civil and ecclesiastical authority.¹⁵

The intrusion of Mennonite colony civic leadership into religious questions and the attempt to deny legitimacy to the emerging Mennonite Brethren group was precisely the kind of issue that engaged Friesen's sense of justice. The avoidance ban placed on Mennonite Brethren members resulted in oppression, incarceration, flogging, impoverishment, and threats of banishment to Siberia. Family members suffered exclusion from other family members as households were divided against themselves.¹⁶

The Chortitza Area Administrative Office circular of February 28, 1862, was all too typical, in Friesen's mind, of the shortsightedness of the political leadership. Referring to the new Mennonite Brethren converts, the memo declared:

"Admonition and persuasion have no effect upon them, since they have become totally taken up with the idea that they are born again and consequently possess the Spirit of God, who makes no mistakes. Police authority must therefore be put to use to keep these dangerous people within bounds. . . the application of law enforcement by police may serve to bring these deluded people back to their senses. Should all of this prove fruitless and these people persist in their heresies, then they must, according to the law, be handed over to the higher authorities as harmful sectarians so that they might be banned from the colonies and sent into exile."¹⁷

Friesen would himself overcome the animosity of these early years. In later life he sought a more ecumenical posture that could heal the breaches of the past. His Mennonite Brethren co-religionists, however, steeped in the conflict of the early years, maintained "a certain reluctance to acknowledge the good aspects, both old and new, in the Mennonite churches."¹⁸ That reluctance, growing out of the circumstances and the interpretation of the early years, would remain a detriment far beyond 1911. Even to this day an unwillingness to acknowledge the good in the larger Mennonite fellowship remains embedded in parts of the Mennonite Brethren imagination.

North American Mennonite Brethren and the Identity Crisis of Mid-Twentieth-Century

At the 1951 convention of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren meeting in Winkler, Manitoba, the Board of Reference and Counsel brought a lengthy document assessing the state of the church and the requirements necessary to shape a future in continuity with the Mennonite Brethren past. At issue were the “revolutionary changes” of the previous decades. Those changes reflected the cultural transition occurring among the Mennonite Brethren immigrants since the 1870s. For the first years of their settlement, in both the United States and Canada, the interaction with the host society was tempered by the semi-isolation of rural villages, ethnic seclusion, cultural traditionalism, and a distinctive language. In the 1940s and 1950s the breakdown of these retardants on cultural integration into North American society was discernible. The board thought that pressures for conformity during two world wars and the easy trafficking with other religious traditions now threatened the continuing unity and coherence of Mennonite Brethren people.¹⁹

By the 1950s Mennonite Brethren, particularly in the United States, were full participants in the political and commercial life of many small towns. They were increasingly active in community affairs. Election to city councils, school boards, and county administrative positions was common. Other Mennonite Brethren were drawn to civic clubs, service clubs, and institutional auxiliary associations. The ease of association was suggested by a 1951 conference report noting that people working in the church had received training at Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and interdenominational schools. Between the early 1940s and 1950, twelve Mennonite Brethren graduates from Central Baptist Seminary alone moved into pastorates.²⁰

The Board of Reference and Counsel issued a series of proposals for dealing with the fracturing theological and cultural identity of the conference. Among the suggestions for recentering the denomination was the call for a new history. What was needed was not another retelling of the same story, but a different angle of vision for interpreting the story, an angle that might utilize the past to refashion the present and future. It was the search for a usable past.

A. H. Unruh’s *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinde, 1860-1954*, published in 1954, was the immediate response to the 1951 need. But its impact was limited, since it was largely a reprinting of sections from P. M. Friesen and other earlier histories. By 1954 the earlier histories were out of print, and another text was needed for the German bible schools in Canada. But Unruh’s volume did not tell the story in a way

that provided the necessary connectors to arrest the fraying identity of the denomination.

John A. Toews' History

The task was left undone until John A. Toews's history in 1975. The introduction to his volume made explicit the relationship of the new history to the needs of the church. Editor and seminary professor A. J. Klassen wrote, "The need for an up-to-date history was born in the crisis of the search for identity that has become so apparent in the life of the church during the last decade or two."²¹ Toews himself, for several decades, was concerned about the identity of the church. His most explicit warning was a 1972 article that began with the assertion that the "Mennonite Brethren are experiencing an identity crisis unprecedented in their history."²² It was a position echoed by others.

For Toews, the precarious identity was the consequence of three factors, the first of which was the internally conflictual trajectory that resulted from the pluralistic influences present at the birth of the MBC in 1860. The diversity of 1860 had been reinforced by a continuing and indiscriminate "exposure to every wind of doctrine from various theological schools of thought." The second factor was the polarization between the "left wing" and the "right wing." Those labels signified the difference between those favoring relief and service and those interested only in missions; between those who would align with the National Association of Evangelicals, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and Campus Crusade, and those whose allegiances ran to inter-Mennonite alliances. The third factor in the identity crisis was a lack of historic self-consciousness: "In our circles there is a woeful ignorance with respect to our past history, as Mennonite Brethren and as a part of the larger Anabaptist movement. Our emphasis on 'existential Christianity' is cutting us off from our historic roots. Such woeful ignorance and deliberate rejection of our past leads to spiritual impoverishment and complete loss of identity."²³

Toews was convinced that the necessary corrective to this identity confusion was a rediscovery of the Anabaptist roots of the church and closer relationships with other Mennonite groups. Insofar as the Mennonite Brethren could reclaim the Mennonite part of their story, they might be able to both recenter themselves and reposition the church for more effective work and witness.²⁴

John A. Toews was an immigrant of the 1920s. Born in Rueckenau, Russia, in 1912, he attended the *Zentralschule* in Alexanderkrone before migrating to Alberta in 1927. His educational training in North America

began at Coaldale Bible School and continued at Tabor College. His tenure at Tabor coincided with the few years that Cornelius Krahn, a fellow Russian immigrant, taught Mennonite history at the school. In 1950 he completed a graduate degree in divinity at United College in Winnipeg. His thesis topic, "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church," showed his interests in the themes of the broader Mennonite story. His subsequent 1964 doctoral dissertation at the University of Minnesota, "Sebastian Franck: Friend and Critic of Early Anabaptism," confirmed his approach to Mennonite Brethren history. Much of his remaining scholarly work in history would be devoted to understanding the specific Mennonite Brethren experience as part of the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite story.²⁵

Toews and the Rediscovery of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism

In coming to nineteenth and twentieth-century Mennonite history from this background in sixteenth-century Anabaptist scholarship, Toews' *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* was able to reassess the relationship between the renewal motifs in Russia and those of the sixteenth century. He was also the first historian to bring professional training to the writing of the denominational story.

Toews completely understood that the moment required more than an update of the past histories. In "The Story behind the History," a candid recounting of his writing the denominational history, he explicitly identified both the needs of his people and the temperament he brought to the task. Invoking Eugene Rice, he observed that "historical writing is in constant flux because historians ask their sources questions newly shaped by changing social and cultural needs."²⁶ Those changing needs required a reassessment of the role of Anabaptism in the 1860 renewal movement and the possibility for using the past to reduce Mennonite Brethren aloofness from the Mennonite family.

Toews found the inspiration for the religious reform movements of mid-nineteenth-century Russia in the Anabaptist-Mennonite story. Chapter 1, "Spiritual Heirs of the Early Anabaptists," suggested the genetic connections. The search for an authentic witness of freely chosen and disciplined religious commitments was at the center of the story. The awakenings in the Russian Mennonite church during the nineteenth century were to be understood as attempts to regain something of the original Anabaptist impulse now muted by the paradoxes of time and isolation. The emergence of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in 1812; the religious ferment at Ohrloff and Gnadenfeld in the mid-century decades; the organization of the *Leseverein*; the impact of Eduard Wuest in the 1840s and 1850s; and the secession of the Mennonite Brethren in 1860 were all

pieces in the same movement of revitalization. These stirrings were responses to the paradox of the believers' church having succumbed, because of its history of spatial isolation, to a "parish" church system. The renewal movements, in seeking to recover the high degree of personal religiosity incumbent in the believer's church story, were reenacting the dynamic of the sixteenth century.²⁷

For Toews the impact of the external inspirations were important, "but in their confessional documents the early Brethren repeatedly identify with the teachings of Menno Simons." He would readily invoke the quotable line of Cornelius Krahn: "This renewal did not want to be Pietistic, nor Baptist, but rather Mennonite. It wanted to be and remain historical, consistent Mennonitism, a pure Mennonitism that was based not upon birth, but upon rebirth."²⁸ Precisely because the renewal grew out of the historic tradition, it was able to flavor the entire Mennonite community. Earlier apologists who had limited the search for "new life" to those joining the Brethren were provincial in their understandings. For Toews this reading of the wider influence of the reform movement also suggested the need for greater Mennonite Brethren generosity towards the existing church in Russia: "the charges made by the Brethren in the Document of Secession were too sweeping and to severe."²⁹

The relationship between Pietism and Anabaptism, so balanced and nurturing to P. M. Friesen, seemed different to Toews. Toews was impressed, not by the complementarity, but by the distance between the two. If Pietism had "revived the early Anabaptist emphasis on personal faith and commitment," it simultaneously was deficient in its "concept of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*." Its place in the Russian Mennonite world was not among those recovering the concept of the believers' church. Rather, "the believers who remained in the old church were probably more in conformity with pietistic tradition than those who seceded."³⁰

The interpretation by J.A. Toews together with a larger renaissance in historical activity and the recovery of memory in the Mennonite Brethren imagination provided new ways of interpreting the past and facing the future.³¹ While recognizing the plurality of theological influences present at the creation of the MBC in 1860, Toews provided a different and more definitive answer to the Mennonite Brethren debate about their ideological parentage. The year 1860 saw the rebirth of Anabaptism. The taproot of the MBC was to be found in the convictions of Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons rather than Eduard Wuest. The rediscovery of a beginning nourished by Mennonite traditions encouraged a more self-conscious embrace of the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

Historical Renaissance: Can it Recenter a Denomination?

J.A. Toews as a leader in the Mennonite Brethren historical activism of the 1960s and 1970s played a role similar to that of Harold S. Bender in the Mennonite Church with his leadership in the "Anabaptist recovery" for his people.³² Beginning in the 1920s Bender and associates were drawn to history by the identity needs of their people. History became a way to navigate between the tensions introduced by fundamentalist and liberal controversies and the transitions of a people in the face of accelerating social change. For the Mennonite Church, history became a way to fix an ideological center precisely when the spatial and cultural identity markers of the past were giving way.

The Mennonite Brethren historical renaissance as exemplified in the Toews' history, the beginnings of the Historical Commission and the creation of the Centers for Mennonite Brethren Studies during the late 1960s and 1970s came to a people more urbanized, occupationally diversified, and theologically fractured than the Mennonite Church of the 1920s. The pluralism of most religious groups has increased exponentially during the twentieth century. Memory, tradition, and history are casualties of accelerating informational, ideational, and cultural change.

Even so, Toews and the other scholars and institutions active in this Mennonite Brethren historical renaissance refashioned the past, and enabled a different future. By linking the Mennonite Brethren story more closely to the cultural nonconforming themes of Anabaptism, they nourished the historic continuity of a denomination increasingly tempted with cultural assimilation; by reaffirming the ethical imperatives of Anabaptism, they renewed interest in service and benevolence in a denomination increasingly tempted to accept the adequacy of verbal witness; and by their more ecumenical perspectives on history, they nurtured a growing participation in associational networks that link together Mennonite peoples.

The historical renaissance in the Mennonite Church provided for the recentering of that denomination. Whether the rediscovery of the importance of the Anabaptist past will do the same for the Mennonite Brethren remains unclear.

ENDNOTES

This essay is abridged, adapted and reprinted with permission from Paul Toews, "Differing Historical Imaginations and the Changing Identity of the Mennonite Brethren," in *Anabaptism Revisited: Essays on Anabaptist/Mennonite studies in honor of C.J. Dyck*, Walter Klaassen, ed. (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1992).

¹ Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, J. B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen, and Harry Loewen, Translation and Editorial

Committee (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), xxvii.

² Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, xxvii.

³ John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*, A.J. Klassen, ed. (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975).

⁴ See David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1933); and "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47 (October 1973):259-308; also 48 (January 1974):5-54. Among the many writings of John B. Toews, see "Cultural and Intellectual Aspects of the Mennonite Experience in Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 53 (April 1979):137-159; *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1982); and *Perilous Journey: The Mennonite Brethren in Russia, 1860-1910* (Hillsboro, Kans.: Kindred Press 1988). Contributions from James Urry include *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989); "The Social Background to the Emergence of the Mennonite Brethren in Nineteenth Century Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988):8-35; and "Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 3 (1985):7-35. Harvey L. Dyck analyzes the changes in "Russian Mennonitism and the Challenge of Russian Nationalism, 1889," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 52 (October 1982):307-341; and "Russian Servitor and Mennonite Hero: Light and Shadow in Images of Johann Cornies," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984):9-28.

⁵ See Frank C. Peters, "The Early Mennonite Brethren Church: Baptist or Anabaptist?" *Mennonite Life* 14 (October 1959):176-178, and Victor Adrian, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 4 (March 26, 1965), special insert. For further discussion of the interpretations utilized to analyze the beginnings of the MBC see Peter J. Klassen, "The Historiography of the Birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church: An Introduction," in *P. M. Friesen and His History: Understanding Mennonite Brethren Beginnings*, Abraham Friesen, ed. (Fresno, Calif.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), 115-127.

⁶ Between Friesen (1911) and Toews (1975) three other histories authorized either by the General Conference or one of its agencies were published: John F. Harms, *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* (Hillsboro, Kans.: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1925); John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, Kans.: Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1950); Abraham H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde, 1860-1954* (Hillsboro, Kans.: General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1955).

⁷ Rodney Sawatzky traces the role of history in the formation of Mennonite identity and the close relationship between historical writing and theologizing. See "History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition through History" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1977).

⁸ Abraham Friesen, *P. M. Friesen and His History*, vii.

⁹ For biographical detail, see Franz C. Thiessen, *P. M. Friesen, 1849-1914: Personal Recollections* (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1974); "Peter Martin Friesen," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956), II, 405.

- ¹⁰ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, xxix.
- ¹¹ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 212.
- ¹² Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 212-213.
- ¹³ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 97.
- ¹⁴ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 212.
- ¹⁵ Thiessen, *P. M. Friesen*, 12-15.
- ¹⁶ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 244, 262.
- ¹⁷ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 312-313.
- ¹⁸ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 977.
- ¹⁹ *Year Book of the 45th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Winkler, Man., 1951), 124-144.
- ²⁰ I have explored more fully some of these transitions in "Faith in Culture and Culture in Faith: The Mennonite Brethren in North America," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988):35-50.
- ²¹ A.J. Klassen, "Introduction," in Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, vii.
- ²² John A. Toews, "In Search of Identity," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 11 (Mar. 10, 1972):2-4, 25; reprinted in *People of the Way: Selected Essays and Address by John A. Toews*, Abe. J. Dueck, Herbert Giesbrecht, and Allen R. Guenther, eds. (Winnipeg, Man.: Historical Committee, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1981).
- ²³ Toews, "In Search of Identity," 2-4, 25.
- ²⁴ Toews, "In Search of Identity," 25.
- ²⁵ John A. Toews, "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church" (B.D. thesis, United College, 1950); John A. Toews, "Sebastian Franck: Friend and Critic of Early Anabaptism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1964). For further biographical detail see Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, *A Man of His Word: A Biography of John A. Toews* (Winnipeg, Man.: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1992).
- ²⁶ John A. Toews, "The Story behind the History," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 14 (April 4, 1975):1. Rice was quoted from Mortimer Chambers, *The Western Experience* (New York: Knopf, 1974), xvi. This Toews essay is also reprinted in *People of the Way*.
- ²⁷ Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, chaps. 1-3. On the paradoxical transition in Russia from a believers' to a parish church, see Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment, 1789-1870," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 25 (January 1951):17-33.
- ²⁸ Toews, "The Story behind the History," 3-4. Krahn is quoted from "Some Social Attitudes of the Mennonites of Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 9 (October 1935):173.
- ²⁹ Toews, "The Story behind the History," 1.
- ³⁰ Toews, "The Story behind the History," 4.
- ³¹ I have tried to identify some of the elements of that larger renaissance in the longer version of this essay — "Differing Historical Imaginations and the Changing Identity of the Mennonite Brethren," in *Anabaptism Revisited*.
- ³² Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (April 1944):67-88.