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Henry W. Lohrenz and Tabor College

by Paul Toews

I

There are not many Grecian buildings on the plains of Kansas. Yet in the small village of Hillsboro stands a college building, erected by rural Mennonites, some fifty years removed from the Russian steppes, that could stand in Athens. The Tabor administration building with its urns, modified doric and ionic pillars and facade is an impressive structure worthy of the style and aesthetic taste of the ancient Greeks. It may have been built by peasants one generation removed from the sod house, but it was conceived by a folk whose imagination was obviously large.

Mennonites are a people who historically prized the virtues of simplicity and humility. Architectural ostentatiousness, high culture and refined sensibilities hardly seem appropriate for a people who have wandered over the face of the earth in search of a corner where they could practice their demanding religious faith.

The Grecian building which replaced the original administration building that burned in 1918, however surprising, becomes comprehensible when placed within the progressive ideal present at the founding of the college. The most clearly articulated statement about the educational philosophy that inspired the creation of Tabor is a 1944 address given by Henry W. Lohrenz, the founding president of Tabor. It was fitting that on his last Tabor Day, before his death in 1945, he would recall the inspiration of the early 1900s. The aims were threefold: "to make the benefits of a liberal education available to the youth of our people"; "to provide



trained leadership to the churches that would support the school"; and "to give preparation for certain vocations."¹ Behind those three primary aims was a view of the world in which faith and intellect, faith and work, and the church and the world were linked together. The liberal education envisioned is one that saw no conflict between the findings of scholarship and the truths of scripture. An elevated mind, one trained in the classics of literature, awakened by the findings of science could more clearly understand the scriptures. Lohrenz's affirmation of the liberal arts was categorical: "There is nothing that can substitute for a good liberal education . . . this enrichment is something that is of far greater value than any material possession. . . . There are no earthly goods that a father can leave to his child which are of greater value than an education of the right kind."² Tabor meant to offer the right kind to the youth of the church. It would link learning and faith together to produce people of "nobility and character."³

The concern to provide trained leadership was essentially a hope for unity in the churches. Tabor would provide a place where the leadership of the church could be socialized into a similar set of religious and cultural values and expectations. This would maintain "unity of aim and spirit in our churches." Without that shared training the churches would be hard pressed to keep both "the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace."⁴

The concern for vocational preparation linked the emerging academy



and college into the larger world of work. Training in the professions—teaching, medicine, nursing, business, expression, home-making and many other vocations—was part of the work of the church. Lohrenz hoped that every student would go forth "to occupy a larger sphere of service than otherwise would have been possible." His vision of Christian faith included the obligation that "every person tend to his business and work with his own hands." Here is a commitment to a worldly activism. Tabor graduates had work to do in the world.⁵

The 1944 statement is, however, incomplete. A fourth aim, although unstated in 1944, was very much present both at the beginning in 1908 and in subsequent years: Lohrenz hoped that the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches would own the school. It might start as a regional enterprise, but the expectation was that the school would win the full acceptance and thereby support of the churches. Lohrenz was committed to the liberal arts tradition, but he was also a conference loyalist committed to building an institution that the conference would embrace.⁶

Henry W. Lohrenz, together with P. C. Hiebert and others, was both founder of Tabor in 1908 and its first president from 1908 to 1931. He is as complex and paradoxical a person as the contradictory imagery of an Athenian Mennonite. Born of immigrant parents he moved in educational, religious and political circles far beyond the boundaries of the immigrant world. Tied in his youth to the landscape of Reno and Marion counties, he felt at home in the universities of the nation's urban centers. Born only fourteen years after the divisive split between the Brethren and the Kirchliche in Russia, he experienced fraternity and friendship with the General Conference Mennonites, the American heirs of the Kirchliche,

Henry W. Lohrenz, c. 1916.

and even took refuge at Bethel College when Tabor floundered. A reserved man, almost shy, who never sought leadership, he became a leader in the Mennonite Brethren as few before or after him. His lifelong intellectual passions were science and religion in an age when the two seemed mutually exclusive and threatened the stability of many a religious college and denomination. He possessed a deeply pious and devout soul that was hinged to a classical mind. Little did he know in 1908 that these commitments would be severely tested. The liberal arts college could be built, but the General Conference adoption could not be secured during his twenty-three years as president. Science and religion, even at Tabor, came to be seen with mutual suspicion. The spacious and constricted elements of his imagination and his people would disagree. Much of his presidency was an attempt to maintain an equilibrium between these varying positions. In the end that equilibrium was lost. But the story of the loss is not the story of Lohrenz alone. The paradoxes are not personal but are rather part of the social biography of his people.

II

The commitment to the liberal arts produced very quickly a college with a remarkable progressive quality. In the initial year, 1908-1909, forty-four different classes were offered in fields as diverse as Bible, Music, Business, Penmanship, German, Mathematics, Natural Science, English, Literature, History and Psychology.⁷ By 1912 the range of courses had expanded to also include Greek, Latin, French, Geography, Sociology, Political Science, Political Economy, Accounting, Physics, Art, Vocal and Instrumental Music.⁸

As the curriculum expanded so did the student organizations. The first was the Olympian Literary Society, founded during the inaugural year for the purpose of fostering "a desire for good literature and high literary achievements." The Debating Club followed in 1909, The YMCA and YWCA were founded in 1910 and 1911. The Student Volunteer Movement, more frequently called the Mission Band, began in 1914.

In addition to these academic and religious organizations, a layer of political associations emerged in the early years. The Intercollegiate Prohibition Association and the Reform League both were part of the young college scene by 1912.⁹

These student organizations like other elements of the college point to its connectedness with the larger cultural, political and religious world. While the YMCA, YWCA and Student Volunteer Movement were clearly devoted to the moral and spiritual nurture of their members, they were also heirs of the social activism of the nineteenth century American evangelicalism. These organizations at the national level were part of the crusading temperament in American protestantism at the turn of the century. Devoted primarily to world mission and evangelization they also worked with considerable effort at the reform and purification of American culture. They were a bridge that linked the religious conservative with the political progressives. This was the era when the theological liberals and conservatives could still agree on the promise of America. The ideal common to the American

puritan and evangelical past of building a Christian civilization was still shared by people of both persuasions. The war had not yet crushed the liberal dream of the "kingdom" and the profanization of American culture had not challenged the conservative hope for a moral order.

Progressivism was the culminating expression of a culture that had long understood and defined itself by protestant moralism. The progressives assumed that a previous American righteousness could be either continued or restored by their appeals to conscience and civic morality. Progressivism was the social conscience of American protestantism during its most expansive time.¹⁰

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are full of protestant crusaders liking with the political reform or progressive tradition. Organizations like these student groups could be orthodox in theology yet liberal in their embrace of the American national promise.¹¹

These progressive sentiments are present elsewhere in the college. The first annual issued in 1916 and covering the first eight years of the

school is a revealing document and a commentary on, what for Mennonites, seems an interesting and perhaps even strange veneration of cultural and political traditions and the progressive spirit of the early twentieth century. The class members of 1913 are each characterized by a set of terms. Included are these descriptions: hopeful optimist; revolutionary, undecided and skeptical; a vivacious, versatile pedagogue; cold, haughty and distant; energetic, active and progressive; doubtfully optimistic.¹² The class of 1915 is characterized by a set of terms that are to define the entire class. The complete set of terms reads: "Classical, socratic, calm, healthy, congenial, strong, enthusiastic, triumphant, prominent, hospitable, benevolent, didactic, liberal, implicit, humble, amiable, accurate, frank, heedful, specific, subjective, unblemished, non-resident, modest, premier, joyful, sociable, perseverent."¹³

Students and faculty of Tabor College, 1915-16. P. C. Hiebert is eighth from left and H. W. Lohrentz, ninth.



Both sets of descriptions are the language of the early twentieth century with its faith in itself, its skepticism, its irreverence about many inherited cultural traditions. It is also the language of the liberal, humane and cultured class. It is hardly the language of the Mennonite congregation. Neither is it profane language. It is the language of an era that was able to be both cosmopolitan and Christian, both sacred and secular, both moralistic and pious.

The class predictions of the early years further suggest how these early Tabor students simultaneously inhabited the worlds of faith and national cultures. Peering into the future to determine where the members of a class will eventuate suggests the range of the imagination when unbounded by reality, the social and professional aspirations of the youth looking for productive lives. The 1910 college class looking towards 1960, fifty years after graduation, includes an imaginary dialog between two members of the class. The conversation turns to the recent trip of one who has just returned from visiting Europe. A few days stop in Northern Germany included a stay at the home of Renetta Schulz. Her husband, the General Field Marshal August von Lohengrin, was a German war hero from the last Russo-German war. Frau Renetta von Lohengrin through her devotion and sacrifices to the wounded soldiers had also won a place in the heart of the German people. They were known as the "Grand Old Couple" in Berlin circles.¹⁴ The embrace of the future even included the German military.

The class of 1917, appearing in 1945, includes one who has just finished a distinguished term as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, a second who as Secretary of the Treasury after the close of the great European war had so distinguished himself that he "is admired by the whole world." Another's poetry had won her the honor of poet laureate of the twentieth century and an artist's work had "accomplished the true art, that is to crystallize emotion into thought."¹⁵

The class poem for the 1915 graduates even more clearly symbolizes

this engagement with the affairs of the world. It is a poem of thirteen stanzas written by a member of the class. Included are the following verses:

"Perhaps there is among our members
one,
Who by keen arguments in congress
halls
Will solve hard problems, pining long
begun
And blot same evil that his land ap-
palls.

Or, others with a bleeding heart will
move
The wicked from their broad destruc-
tive way,
Direct their misled thoughts of joys
alone,
And bring on hearts of winter day of
May.

Or, some will rule Muses' mountain
crest
Word into swinging rime or charming
prose
Responding feelings nursed by na-
ture's breast
And wreath for others many a flush-
ing rose.

A warm farewell we bid to our friends
all;
The evening dumbs the voices of the
air;
The world extends to us her pleading
call
To go for service and make her more
fair."¹⁶

Politics and poetry did not claim most of the early graduates. Rather they went into education. Seventy-five percent of the graduates of the first eight years went on to graduate school. Ninety-four percent of the next ten year's graduates took further schooling.¹⁷ Renetta Schulz, in 1922 could report of the 1910-1912 graduates that forty-five percent earned Master's degrees and sixteen percent had Ph.D's. Of those first three years, eighty-eight percent of the graduates were teachers. fifty-six percent were college professors.¹⁸ Many went to the nation's finest universities. By 1920 A. A. Groening, Henry Schenkofsky and Tina Harms were studying at Berkeley; P. S. Goertz (an earlier McPherson graduate), Adolf Frantz, M. H. Schlichting and A. J. Harms were at Yale Divinity School; Gustave Nikkel was at Northwestern University; A. R. Ebel was at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Boston Museum of Art; C. C. Janzen

and many others were at the University of Kansas. If the educational attainments were remarkable, Renetta Schulz could also comment of these early graduates that 100 percent were church members and 88 percent were still active in the YMCA or YWCA.¹⁹

The progressive spirit nourished also a specific identification with cultural and national achievements. The retention of German culture is a frequent theme among the Mennonite immigrants and their first generation descendants. While some may have argued for the cultural continuity on the grounds that German was the language of the soul and of familiar religious discourse,²⁰ others wished for its preservation because of its linkage to a noble culture. An unidentified writer in the *Tabor College Herald* (November 1916) argued for the maintenance of the German language because it would show "weakness of character" to "forget that we come from the noblest stock in the world. What nationality can boast of nobler ancestry? The Trustees were a strong and healthy race. They were pure and honest of heart and had the noblest aspirations. After they accepted the Christian religion, there were no other people more true to the faith."²¹ The loss of the German language, in these odes to German culture, seemed to presage the loss of cultural and religious vitality. The German people had combined culture, political and religious achievements in a way that suggested the vitality of any one was to be found in connection with the presence of the others. The linkage made it as easy to applaud the political/economic/cultural achievements as it was to praise their religious devotion.

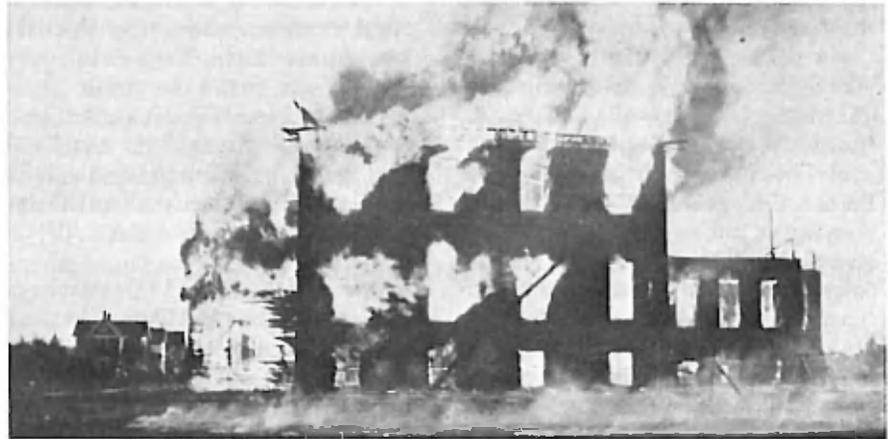
Lohrenz as early as 1901 in a speech to the German Verein at McPherson college linked the perpetuation of German culture with the retention of religious faith. The point of the intersection between the two was not that German was the language of faith but that it was the language of a superior culture. American and German culture had many elements which were honorable and could be recommended to Mennonite people. German culture

should be respected because American culture "will be almost always misunderstood by those who despise their own culture, who stir it into the dirt and spoil their Christentum along with their Deutschtum. Therefore it is the duty of every German . . . to disseminate German ways of thinking and true Christianity at the same time."²²

The German who had no self-esteem about his own culture would be unable to appreciate the noble aspects of American culture. But beyond this affection for cultural development seems to lie the pervasive American belief that religious, cultural and political development were interrelated. If that were true in a general rather than specific way then one could applaud either American or German developments.

That linkage become more apparent with the increasing veneration of American culture. Much as Germany was exalted because of its high culture and religiosity, so American society was worthy of patriotic affection. In successive issues of the *Herold*, in 1916, J. H. Lohrenz and Adolf Franz exhorted the college community to be hopeful of America's future. For Lohrenz, brother to H. W. Lohrenz, America was the bulwark of freedom, prosperity and virtue in the world. This prominence had been achieved as "true patriots fought for the stars and stripes." This birthright of true liberty and justice would be preserved for future generations. The article closed with the rhetorical flourish: "Today we stand at the height of prosperity. Shall this Republic continue its progress? Shall we protect our nation's life and warrant its stand for the future?" The answer was self evident. The preservation of morality, civilization and cultural attainments were linked.²³

Frantz pressed the linkage further. Christianity by solving the social, political and cultural problems of American society would position the nation for bringing the gospel to the farthest corners of the earth. The nation had become the ark of the covenant, the bearer of good tidings. In its hands lay the destiny of the world. He would write "such then are our opportunities for



Above, administration building of Tabor College under construction; below, the fire of 1918.

the future. Will we dare to grasp them? Will we lead the world in the things which are noble and just? It is ours to dare and do; it is ours to neglect and rue. In our hands lie the momentous issues of the future. We will pay the price, we will dare and do."²⁴

Frantz's confidence was shared. For P. F. Wall, many years mathematics instructor at the college and interim president after Lohrenz's departure in 1931, Christianity and civilization were intertwined in ways that made the building of American society part of one's contribution to the evangelization of the world. Those nations that were civilized were so because of Christian convictions. The uncivilized were so because of their unbelief. The logic was that since faith and civilization were hinged together one was obliged to value civilization. It buffered the demise of faith.²⁵

Education in this environment which linked morality, culture and civilization was preparation for service in the church, community, nation and world. G. M. Doerksen, in a

1917 article in the *Herold*, made a series of suggestive comments. Those who possessed nobility, character and virtue would participate in the moral uplift of humanity. The highest expression of that noble ideal was the life and example of Jesus. Colleges were designed to "inspire men and women for this great ideal." But the ideal was one that clearly accepted and cherished much of the national political and cultural order. Doerksen would write: "were it not for education, happiness, prosperity and all morality would decline. Nations would again fall into barbarism. Therefore education is one of the brightest stars in the world of human happiness, prosperity and progress."²⁶

Lohrenz of course can hardly be held accountable for the expressions of his contemporaries. Yet in a

series of addresses and articles stretching from 1912 to 1944 on the nature and function of education, he showed his own commitment to these progressive sentiments. A 1912 article on the Sunday schools revealed the degree to which progressivist assumptions shaped his thinking. He was impressed with the advances of civilization. Scientific investigation and social reform had produced a "great reconstructive work in commercial and industrial lines." He now wished to bring these new principles into the life of the church and saw the Sunday School as the agent for such reconstruction.²⁷

Much later, in 1938, Lohrenz delivered an address, "Contributions of American Mennonite Colleges to Home and Society", at the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Bethel College. It was an artful weaving of the responsibility of the Mennonite college to preserve, refine and awaken. The preservation function included the essential values of faith and Mennonite life. Refining involved the purifying of the esthetic, literary and musical talents of the students. Like his contemporaries, Lohrenz linked the refinement of these sensibilities to the development of character and to a more spacious spirit. The human mind and spirit that was cultivated could more fully encounter the divine. The last contribution of the Mennonite college to society was to develop an appreciative patriotism, a cosmopolitan citizenship and a response to world needs.²⁸

III

This openness of Mennonite participation in the larger culture and even the assumption of some notions of social responsibility may seem strange for a people who had historically lived by privileges which sequestered them from participation in the larger public order. The early Tabor must be seen as part of a cultural and intellectual change that affected the Mennonites in both Russia and America in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mennonites heretofore lived largely on the boundaries of various social systems. The forms of political consolidation that resulted in the

building of national cultures coupled with the industrial and urban revolution made this isolation more difficult. The very nature of the immigration into the United States without its guarantees of Mennonite lands or Mennonite territory and without political autonomy forced the Mennonites (including the Brethren) into much more contact with the larger world than heretofore.²⁹

This generation of Mennonite Brethren, as well as other Mennonites, did not shrink from these contacts. They linked their religious devotion, moral rectitude, and cultural development to more than the boundaries of the Mennonite world. Theirs was not a sectarian vision of the people of God isolated from the national culture. They could link the path of Christian virtue, diligence and discipline to scientific and cultured progress and the uplift of humanity.

The opening line of the statement of purpose in the Tabor catalog, from the first complete English edition of the catalog (1917) and for many years to come, stated with clarity this progressive assumption. "The purpose of the school from the beginning has been to benefit humanity in general and in particular the denomination that erected it through the dissemination of general culture and biblical information and the development of character . . ."³⁰

IV

But progressivism was not the only current running thru the MB world. The nature and style of the young college became a matter of debate and concern almost as soon as the doors opened. The liberal arts ideal was tested almost immediately and continuously. The third annual meeting of the Tabor College Corporation in May, 1911 revealed the differing mentalities that were to persist throughout Lohrenz's tenure as president. The part of the college that the corporation could praise was the missionary societies, the YMCA and YWCA, and the interest in missionary activity. The corporation members had two concerns; first whether the secular lecture course and the Literary Society

should be continued and secondly, whether the main purpose of the school was "to measure up intellectually with other schools" or to teach the fundamentals of faith. Distinctions were drawn between those activities that "have only an intellectual worth" and those that "serve spiritual life."³¹ This distinction, real in the minds of the corporation members, was also present in the faculty. In the following year faculty members resigned both because the new college was intellectually too spacious and because it was intellectually too constrictive. It was simultaneously too pious and too worldly.

The 1911-12 school term was fraught with conflict between the contending positions. In October, B. E. Ebel and D. E. Harder, leaders of the progressive party, felt that there was a "check upon our ambitions in the lurking unrest already manifest upon the horizon." Ebel could write that the criticism of the previous spring were "merely a pretension and others will be found till the real end is gained."³² The Literary Society, the focus of the criticism, was reigned in. Its independence was checked and carefully controlled by faculty supervision.

The organization of a chapter of the Reform League in January, 1912, and a coed social early in the year, however, only precipitated another crisis. Both were opposed by the conservatives. P. C. Hiebert, studying in Lawrence at the University of Kansas that year, wrote to B. E. Ebel, as "the general of the progressive party," that while the social was doubtless a violation of school policy, the conservatives had manipulated the incident for their own benefit.³³ The progressives meanwhile feared that so long as the school was guided by this "guilted mockery of conservatism,"³⁴ there would be little growth. Tabor stood at 95 students that year and Bethel had an enrollment of over 200. The gap was to be explained in terms of Bethel's more progressive style.

Lohrenz was caught between the factions. Some of his faculty pitied the position in which he found himself. What was not to be pitied was the tenuous position in which the

young school found itself. Lohrenz in varying moods of resignation and courage corresponded with Hiebert in February and March of 1912. In February he wrote that "the future is dismal." By March he more precisely stated the issues that needed resolution. The college had been founded to operate "in commitment to the spirit of our conference." That spirit was now threatened by the differing perceptions and conflict between the board of directors and the faculty over what were to be the "governing principles" that would shape the curriculum and the social life of the college.³⁵ By late spring a purge of some faculty seemed possible, and P. C. Hiebert debated returning to the college for the next year.³⁶

In the fall of 1912, Lohrenz was studying at the University of Kansas, and Hiebert was acting President. He wrote to Lohrenz on the eve of a meeting of church leaders in Hillsboro that prospects were not good: "The whole affair is so disagreeable that I wish I were in Saskatchewan. . . ." While there were many staunch supporters of the college and he expected "no radical anti-college action," he did assume that there would be "a good many thunderbolts whizzing about." His consolation to Lohrenz was "well brother, don't worry about this matter either, at least I try to tell myself every day, just to work on conscientiously for the good cause regardless of what others may do and if the thing then fails, I will at least have the satisfaction of having done what I could."³⁷

One contemporary observed that the root of the misunderstanding was that from the outset there were those who expected the new college to be a Bible school with a restricted curriculum instead of a liberal arts college with its expansive offering. Furthermore the students sought more liberal forms of social activity and engaged in more cosmopolitan activities than had been anticipated. Some supporters had been willing to give the college a few years to establish the conservative atmosphere. The seeming inability or unwillingness to do so created such doubt that by 1912 the leadership questioned the en-

during viability of the new venture.³⁸ The fact that the largest percentage of the students were preparing for teaching or church vocations did not mitigate these concerns.

The next nineteen years of the Lohrenz presidency are replete with similar tensions between what might be termed the progressive and conservative elements in the college and the church. A particular poignant encounter is the experience of the Yalies who came to teach at Tabor. M. H. Schlichting, Adolf Frantz, A. J. Harms, graduates of Tabor, and P. S. Goertz, an earlier graduate of McPherson college, all attended Yale Divinity School, earned Bachelor of Divinity degrees, and returned to teach at Tabor during the 1920's. They were primarily trained of courses in biblical and religious studies but all essentially taught in other departments. That would not be particularly noteworthy if their stay did not coincide with the college's inability to staff the Bible Department. Lohrenz in his annual report to the board in 1924 noted that the "Bible department which is to constitute the very core of our entire school life does not have the necessary strength we need for our assignment."³⁹ H. F. Toews and D. E. Harder, both long time members of the Bible Department, left in 1922 and 1923. While Harder returned for the 1925-27 period, the department lacked a strong and continuing presence from 1923 until 1935 when Lohrenz returned to the new Bible School as full time faculty member in the newly reconstituted Tabor. The Yalies were obviously not acceptable replacements for the previous generation. They all exited from Tabor between 1925 and 1930 because in varying degrees they found the general religious, cultural and intellectual conservatism of the community and school too restrictive.⁴⁰

Their departure was part of the conservative ascendancy at the college during the twenties. The decade is noted for its religious controversy. Fundamentalist/Modernist quarrels erupted in many religious communities. Denominations fractured and denominational schools were frequently the center of such controversies.⁴¹ The conflict among the

Mennonite Brethren was not between modernists and fundamentalists. No charges of modernism were leveled at the college during the decade. But there were new strains to be reckoned with. In the West, pentecostalism made inroads into Brethren communities. In the North a new generation of immigrants arrived with a distinct history and a strong set of leaders. The experience of the World War introduced a peculiar set of tensions for mid-western Mennonites in particular. The cumulative effect of these experiences was to squeeze the progressives and to enhance the position of the conservatives. Lohrenz increasingly found it difficult to work in the situation. He wrote in 1927 that he had always hoped to "direct the school in such a way that a thorough academic education with deep true piety would go hand in hand."⁴² There had never been any conflict between the two for Lohrenz, but for others they were seen increasingly as separate and perhaps even unrelated.

In this world where commitments previously held together were being pitted against each other, where the equilibrium was distorted, Lohrenz seemed to drift towards the conservatives. A letter written to his brother-in-law in 1927 is symptomatic of the drift. He wrote about various issues dividing the school and suggested the time had come for a "deep purification which would affect the basic motivations and lead to the unification of the faculty so that one could continue to work more in keeping with the position of our brotherhood and . . . the word of God."⁴³

By the time Lohrenz resigned in 1931, P. E. Schellenberg, a fellow faculty member and future president, would define the division as a "hopeless separation of what remains of faculty and students and interest into College and Bible School" factions. Behind this division Schellenberg ventured a constituency "that has always looked askance at the whole enterprise and has now practically lost its faith in it."⁴⁴

A change from the progressive beginnings had indeed occurred, and two movements at the outset of the

thirties symbolized the new mood. The 1930 organization of the Bible School on a different basis than it had previously existed was a clear signal that the Bible School movement was more than Schellenberg's imagination. The school was a response to some leaders in the church who thought that a Bible and Mission school could train more specifically workers for both foreign and home ministries. It operated under the supervision of a General Conference committee and the Executive Committee of the Board of Foreign Missions.⁴⁵

The Bible School movement, generally as it gained strength in the larger culture during the 1920s, was many things. It was surely a response to the rift in theological positions. But it was also part of a growing estrangement with American culture. They expressed cultural resistance as well as theological resistance. For those who had long resisted identification with American society, this movement was part of the search for disengagement that countered the Liberal Arts ideal with its cultural connections.⁴⁶

The 1931-32 Tabor College Catalog, the first after Lohrenz had resigned as president, suggested another important change. The statement of purpose was substantially revised. The previous statement, in effect from the first complete English edition of the catalog in 1917 thru 1931, began with the spacious statement that "the purpose of the school from the beginning has been to benefit humanity in general . . ." The new statement of purpose began with the concern "to impart genuine Christian education that will qualify for the general needs of everyday life." The scope had narrowed. A new addition to the 1931 version called the college "to meet the need for a fundamentalist College and Bible school. This is the need of the Christian people in general and the churches that sponsor the school in particular." The use of that language in the context of the fundamentalist/modernist debate signaled a different kind of college.⁴⁷

In 1922 Lohrenz submitted his first letter of resignation. Although he later rescinded the action, the letter reflected the difficult posture

in which he found himself. He reflected back on the beginnings when he "tried to confront two large opposing forces" when all he had "was just a rod." He clearly understood the tensions in which he functioned.⁴⁸ But they should not be thought of only in terms of the progressive and conservative forces, or the college and Bible school forces. There were personal forces as well. The administration of the college lacked unity. Friction between Lohrenz, the president, and P. C. Hiebert, the vice-president, persisted during his entire presidency.

Beyond the ideological and personal forces that worked with differing impulses, there were other opposing forces in the conference that provided the larger context in which the college functioned. The college began with the clear assumption that the conference would soon adopt the fledgling institution. The church's reluctance to own the college was apparent in the General Conference sessions of 1915 and persisted until the college collapsed in the 1930s.⁴⁹ The beginning of the college in 1908 coincided with the creation of district conferences as regional entities and the meeting of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren churches on a tri-annual rather than annual schedule. It was the beginning of a fracturing process that made cooperation more difficult and estrangement easier.⁵⁰ National and regional loyalties increasingly made it difficult to cooperate on programs of mission and education in North America. The district and General Conference repeated expressions of support for the college but offered little tangible support. The resolutions to pledge fixed amounts on a per member basis or to raise substantial annual contributions received the delegates' votes but not their checks. The notable exception to this general pattern of insufficient giving was the response to the crisis of April 30, 1918. The burning of the school created a wave of support, sympathy and giving that seemed to indicate the deep rootage and acceptance of the college in the churches. The wave peaked in 1920, and by 1922 the financial status of the school was again doubtful. Even the mag-

nificence of the new building and the increased enrollment that followed the war could not generate the support to insure the school. The economics of the depression linked to the other strains caused the college to falter.

V

But the college faltered because the MB world was fractured. Held within the boundaries of a small denomination were the contradictions of the emerging modern world with its cultural, political and theological pluralism. The college, existing on the boundary between the smaller ethno-religious community and the larger social order, felt the fracturing sooner and more intensely than did the elements of the church yet removed from the boundary. The college, with one face directed towards the larger world into which its graduates would move and the other face directed back towards the Mennonite village, would always be in a tenuous position. Three years after Lohrenz left the presidency in 1931 the college closed for a year. The Grecian temple stood closed and empty in 1934-35. At stake were many issues. The Mennonite Brethren have historically been uncertain whether they wanted Bible institutes or colleges; whether science and faith could be reconciled or not; whether intellectualism or ignorance was the mother of heresy; whether they were progressive or conservative; whether schools should be sponsored by the General Conference, the National Conferences or District Conferences.

Lohrenz sought to bridge the distance from the Mennonite village to the learned centers of the world. He could link an openness to the intellectual, cultural and artistic world of the twentieth century with a commitment to a life of prayer, devotion and faith. He could personally contain the multiple and frequently contradictory impulses that characterized the Mennonite Brethren of his era. His people could not resolve them. But neither could the generations that followed. The subsequent history of Tabor College, Fresno Pacific College, the Mennonite Brethren Bible College of Winnipeg and the Mennonite Brethren

Biblical Seminary of Fresno all contain elements of the same story. The contradictions are part of the biography of an ethno-religious immigrant people adapting to the requirements and possibilities of life in an increasingly pluralistic environment.

ENDNOTES

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4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. William J. Schmidt, "History of Tabor College" (M.A. thesis, University of Wichita, 1961), p. 49; Henry W. Lohrenz, "Ein Bericht für Tabor College," *Yearbook of the 1927 General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren* (Henderson, Nebraska).
7. "First Year Report of the Faculty of Tabor College to the Board of Directors," Henry W. Lohrenz Papers, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies—Fresno, Box 2, folder 1.
8. "Vierter Jahresbericht des Directorium an den Tabor College Schulverein," Lohrenz Papers, Box 2, folder 1.
9. *Tabor College Bluejay*, 1908-1916.
10. Clyde Riffen, "The Progressive Ethos," in Stanley Cohen and Lorman Ratner, eds., *The Development of an American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1933), pp. 144-180.
11. Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements: Their Origin and Intercollegiate Life* (New York: Association Press, 1934); C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979); C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951).
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14. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 42-43.
17. Leo J. Goentzel, "A Followup of the Graduates of Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1948" (M.A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1948), pp. 20-21.
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24. Adolf I. Frantz, "The Future of America," *Tabor College Herald V* (October, 1916): 28-30.
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