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## FUNDAMENTALIST CONFLICT IN MENNONITE COLLEGES: A RESPONSE TO CULTURAL TRANSITIONS?

PAUL TOEWS \*

In 1913 Noah Beyers, President of Goshen College, and C. Henry Smith, Dean of the College, resigned and moved to Bluffton College. Thirty-eight years later, in 1951 in Hillsboro, Kansas, P. E. Schellenberg resigned from the presidency of Tabor College and moved to Bethel College. After a stint at Bethel, he too joined the Bluffton College faculty. In the intervening years J. E. Hartzler resigned in 1918 as President of Goshen, in 1921 as President of Bethel and in 1931 as President of Witmarsum Seminary. J. W. Kliever, President of Bethel, resigned in 1920.

During the same years several new institutions of higher learning emerged in the American Mennonite world: Eastern Mennonite School in the east in 1917, Grace Bible Institute in the Plains states in 1943 and Pacific Bible Institute in the West in 1944.

There is nothing peculiar about the resignations of college presidents or the founding of new colleges. It happens with some frequency. Yet these endings and beginnings share something in common. They reflect historical forces and sentiments as divergent as the differing times and places in which they happened. But in varying fashion they are all episodes in the story of fundamentalism and American Mennonites.

The events were not isolated tempests in the Mennonite college world. They are linked to struggles in the supporting conferences. In both the colleges and the conferences there are Mennonite versions of the Fundamentalist Crusade. The outer boundaries of the crusade are not entirely clear. It apparently began in the Mennonite Church (sometimes called Old Mennonites; hereafter MC) by 1908, in the General Conference Mennonites (hereafter GC) by 1916 and in the Mennonite Brethren (hereafter MB) by the mid-1920s. For MC Mennonites the dramatic points of conflict are the crisis at Goshen College from 1913-24, the creation of EMS in 1917, the 1921 conference adoption of the Eighteen Fundamentals; the mid-1920s publications of John Horsch; and the beginnings of the periodicals, *Christian Exponent* and *Sword and Trumpet*.

For the GC Mennonites the identifiable moments in the Fundamentalist Crusade are the Bethel College crisis of 1916-20 and 1930-32; the 1929 charge of Modernism at Bluffton College; the General Conference sessions in 1929; the 1931 closing of Witmarsum Seminary; and the 1943 founding of Grace Bible Institute.

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For the Mennonite Brethren the central arenas for conflict over fundamentalist issues are the exodus of people from Tabor in the 1920s; the prolonged crisis there from 1943-51; and the General Conference sessions of 1943 and 1951.

The incidents in the colleges and the colleges' varied relationships with the supporting conferences are not the story of fundamentalism in the Mennonite world. To read Mennonite fundamentalism through the conflictual settings is to limit and perhaps distort the real impact of fundamentalism in the Mennonite world. Yet the intensity of the conflict in the colleges and the nature of the Goshen, Bethel and Tabor stories do provide us with some clues as to the social function of fundamentalism in the three Mennonite groups.

Our understanding of fundamentalism, like most things, grows more complex the more we seek to define and describe it. A previous generation knew that it was an eruption in the backwaters of American society that sought to deny the advances of modern culture in general and science in particular. It had something to do with religious faith but more with sociological alterations in a society undergoing the transformations of industrialization and urbanization. In this historiographical tradition the fundamentalists were observed to be primarily the negators of modernity who impinged upon the denominational machinery of many protestant bodies. Politically they expressed attitudes of alienation, distrust and repression. Psychologically they were victims of authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism and simplistic religious experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Historians of more recent vintage have discovered that these cultural explanations of fundamentalism, however colorful, were caricatures of something that was also theological and stood in a legitimate intellectual and theological tradition. The work of the late Ernest Sandeen provided a corrective by noting the fundamentalist rootage in nineteenth-century theology, particularly a millenarian tradition and Princeton theology. He provided a theological definition of fundamentalism by describing it as an alliance between dispensational premillennialism and a doctrine of inspiration that guaranteed an inerrant scripture. This interpretation of fundamentalism suggested not so much anti-intellectualism but rather intellectualism of a different sort.<sup>2</sup>

The most recent scholarship, specifically the work of George Marsden, renders a much more complex interpretation that calls us to recognize fundamentalism as a variegated phenomenon that embraced many

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1 Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954); Stewert G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931); Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963); H. Richard Niebuhr, "Fundamentalism," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, VI (New York: Macmillan, 1937).

2 Ernest R. Sandeen, "Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," *Church History*, XXXVI (1967), 66-83; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

strands of the American religious past.<sup>3</sup> It contained within itself the lingering forms of nineteenth-century revivalism, Pietism, evangelicalism, a congealing Presbyterian theology nourished by Princeton Seminary, historic Methodism modulating into Holiness and Pentecostalism, new millenarian interpretations, Common Sense or Baconian science, and denominational conservatism.

For Marsden the story of fundamentalism centers on how people of diverse strands who commonly thought of themselves as evangelical Christians were influenced by and responded to the religious and intellectual crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These evangelicals were the heirs of the respectable Christians who had hoped to fashion a Christian society. They sensed that the culture in which they were located was clearly turning away from its religious past and from the shared assumptions that they and most other Americans had long sustained.<sup>4</sup>

The evangelical assumptions were fast corroding under the impact of modernity. Modernism was both a new theology and the cultural changes which that theology endorsed. It was the banning of God from the creation of the universe and thereby implicitly from his continuing role in the world and the social/cultural changes that sustained this view.

Fundamentalism generally—but more particularly the twentieth-century form—was the militant opposition to modernism in both forms. What distinguished its response from other forms of unease or opposition to the emergence of modernity was precisely its militancy. For Marsden it became a movement of both theological and cultural opposition to the drift of American culture.

The drift of the larger culture created a fundamental ambivalence in the fundamentalist movement. Its roots were clearly in the Puritan and early nineteenth-century evangelical ideal of building a Christian civilization. Yet the creeping forms of paganism required a wholesale denunciation of American society. They simultaneously felt themselves part of American culture and alienated from it. They alternatively wished to redeem it and to flee from it. They were both insiders and outsiders.

The Marsden interpretation suggests that, while fundamentalism was certainly a defense of the faith, it was also part of the larger search for the relationship between culture and Christianity within the American context. The agonizing reappraisal required by both the cultural and theological context produced theological and cultural fundamentalism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> George R. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vii-ix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-8.

For Mennonites fundamentalism also was a way to reassess cultural and theological issues. People who understood themselves as separate from American culture should have been put off by much of fundamentalism, for so much was clearly American. Yet Mennonites imbibed freely of cultural and theological fundamentalism. The dialogue that Mennonite fundamentalists were engaged in paralleled the national dialogue in various ways but was also modulated by historic Mennonite distinctives and concerns. With the exception of John Horsch, the MC writer and historian, Mennonites were not participants in the larger fundamentalist movement. Yet they were participants in their own way in both forms of fundamentalism—theological and cultural. The precise mixture of the two forms depended upon the history of the particular group.

Fundamentalism came to differing parts of the Mennonite world at different times, but for all it accentuated the ambivalence of the small ethno-religious groups' relationship to the dominant culture. Fundamentalism among Mennonites was as much an effort to redefine the relationship between culture and Christianity as a crusade to root out theological modernism—and perhaps it was even more the former than the latter. It was that kind of movement because the theological modernism in the Mennonite world was only incipient and marginal. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to know against whom the theological fundamentalists were fighting. Theron Schlabach has aptly described John Horsch, the leading Mennonite crusader, as often “aiming elephant guns to kill flies.”<sup>6</sup>

American cultural fundamentalists experienced a central ambivalence to the drift of American culture. For Mennonite fundamentalists, the ambivalence was in regard to the drift of Mennonites into American culture more than the drift of the larger culture. In the early and mid-twentieth century, various Mennonite groups made a particular response to a particular, if varying, set of cultural transitions. Mennonite fundamentalism was a response to the intrusiveness of the modern world. It was part of the Americanization process and part of the resistance to Americanization. It was a means of both reinforcing Mennonite separatism and of accelerating the integration of Mennonites into the larger society.<sup>7</sup> The Mennonite proponents of fundamentalism generally understood themselves as resisting the advance into American society. They thought of themselves as purging the Mennonites of the alien ideologies that had crept in through modernism. The interpreters have more frequently seen it as a form of cultural accommodation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Theron Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel: Mission and the Mennonite Church, 1863-1944* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980), 114.

<sup>7</sup> Theron Schlabach, “Paradoxes of Mennonite Separatism,” *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, II (1979), 12-17, makes the point about many forms of Mennonite borrowing from the larger cultural world.

<sup>8</sup> See particularly Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel*, 127, 150, 275-76; Rodney J. Sawatsky, “The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Nonresistance, 1908-1944” (M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1973).

In 1967 Ernest Sandeen noted that "the fate of fundamentalism in historiography is worse than its lot in history."<sup>9</sup> The phrase has become something of a platitude. It does describe the state of historical writing about fundamentalism among MB Mennonites and many of the smaller groups, and also to some extent among GC Mennonites, but not among MC Mennonites. If the former groups are marked by a paucity of historical writing, the latter group has a growing tradition of scholarship. The recent writings of Sawatsky, Hershberger, Schlabach, Juhnke and Hostetler all provide insightful commentaries into MC fundamentalism.<sup>10</sup> They move the discussion from a concern for characterizing fundamentalism as an alien ideology that intruded from the outside and displaced an authentic Mennonite religious virtue with something less valued to a concern for more analytical frameworks that seek to understand the nature and shape of MC fundamentalism. In the process they offer paradigms for understanding other Mennonite varieties of fundamentalism.

This new historiography essentially promotes two conceptual frameworks: fundamentalism is part of the denominationalizing process and part of the movement toward denominational consolidation; fundamentalism, in its Mennonite forms, is really something more akin to denominational conservatism than American fundamentalism.

The first assumes that ever since the mid-nineteenth century for GC Mennonites and since the late nineteenth century for MC and MB Mennonites the various groups had been in the process of developing the characteristics of American denominationalism. Denominations are defined in various ways, but common to most definitions are the creation of purposive activities and a clearly articulated theology. The purposive activities are the new forms of work and activity by which the group coheres and extends itself into the larger world. The creation of an articulated theology is the necessary second stage in the creating of an identifiable denomination in the mosaic of American denominations. The adoption of purposive activities is acknowledged to have been a process of borrowing and emulating from other protestant groups. It was clearly an Americanization process that brought into the house of Menno the practices and activities of American Christianity. Theological fundamentalism was part of the larger search for the distinctives of Mennonite theology. The fundamentalist movement coincided with this second stage of

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<sup>9</sup> Sandeen, "Towards a Historical Interpretation," 66.

<sup>10</sup> Sawatsky; Guy F. Hershberger, "Comments on Sawatsky's Thesis: 'The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Nonresistance, 1908-1944,'" Guy F. Hershberger Papers, Box 57, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.; Rodney J. Sawatsky, "History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition Through History" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1977); Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel*; James C. Juhnke, "Anti-Modernism and Boundary Maintenance in a Consolidating Denomination" (MS, 1981); James C. Juhnke, "A Deep Root in Bethel: Mennonites and the Fundamentalist Movement" (MS, 1982). Both of the Juhnke papers were made available by the author. Beulah Hostetler, "Franconia Mennonite Conference and American Protestant Movements, 1840-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1977); Beulah Hostetler, "Leadership Patterns and Fundamentalism in Franconia Mennonite Conference, 1890-1950," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, V (1982), 2-9.

the denominationalizing process. Amidst the dividing of theology into two mutually exclusive and even hostile camps, Mennonites had to define and distinguish a theology by which they could identify themselves to themselves and to others.

The second paradigm suggests that the Mennonites who seem to be fundamentalists were frequently denominational conservatives. Many of them distanced themselves from the highly structured and tightly guarded systems of the fundamentalist crusaders. Ambivalence about dispensational premillennialism characterized the major Mennonite groups. A softening of the constricted language of inspiration and the creedal quality of the "fundamentals" placed them in an older tradition of theological orthodoxy. They were the traditionalists who wished to conserve the distinctive traditions of the various Mennonite denominations. They meant to insure that the new issues of scriptural authority or millenarianism did not overwhelm the older corpus of belief. These Mennonite conservatives frequently thought of themselves as more fundamental than the fundamentalists in that they sought to preserve and even revitalize the historic fundamentals like nonconformity and nonresistance as well as the new issues.<sup>11</sup>

The denominationalizing and conservative perspectives on Mennonite fundamentalism reveal much, yet they can be supplemented by a perspective which links fundamentalism to the cultural need for defining the boundaries or the location of an ethno-religious group within the experience of rapid cultural shifts. Such a perspective suggests that MC fundamentalism was a response to the awakening or quickening which had significantly transformed their relationship to the larger world; that GC fundamentalism was an initial way of responding to the cultural transition accompanying World War I; and that MB fundamentalism emerged with the transition from a largely closed Germanic culture and language to more open participation in American society. The fundamentalist conflicts at the three colleges were expressions of these transitions.

The context of fundamentalism in the MC church was the awakening or quickening that transformed the church in the last decades of the nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth centuries. Borrowing from American Protestants, the church created the institutional and denominational networks—conferences, Sunday schools, colleges, publishing houses, revival meetings, other special meetings—characteristic of the purposive denomination. The awakening brought the MC church from relative isolation into contact with the larger Protestant world. The awakening embraced the institutional forms of the modern world. It was an opening up process. Schlabach has noted that it caused breaches in

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<sup>11</sup> The first interpretation is more explicit in Sawatsky, "History and Ideology," than the others. It is implied in the Hostetler concern for differentiating Mennonite eschatology from premillennialism. The second view is suggested by Schlabach and Juhnke.

the Mennonite fences and "the horses had begun to run in different directions."<sup>12</sup>

Those who wandered more freely in the Protestant community brought back many things. A few brought back hints of theological modernism. More brought back a refusal to utilize the categories of the strict fundamentalists and in a world of simple dichotomies they seemed to be liberals.

But even more brought back forms of cultural modernism: new fashions, new modes of conversation, new aspirations, new forms of church service, new educational degrees. They may have been theological modernizers but they were clearly cultural modernizers. That distinction, however, was not always made and the two could be confused and misidentified. If the awakening was the opening-up process for MC Mennonites, fundamentalism was the buttoning-down process. It was an interlocking movement to codify doctrine, centralize church authority and rigidify cultural nonconformity.<sup>13</sup> The repeated clashes at Goshen College from 1913 into the thirties suggest all three of the forms of constrictions.<sup>14</sup> At issue were interpretations of scripture, the authority of the church generally and the bishops in particular, and restrictions regarding dress and amusements. The closing of the college for the 1923-24 term revolved more about church authority than the authority of the scriptures. Both sides in the fateful debate understood the questions to be those of authority versus freedom, individuality versus conformity. Was the plain coat a necessary sign of separation from the world? Could one be a good Mennonite and reject the authority of the bishop? The reigning bishop of the church, Daniel Kauffman, would answer the questions on the side of standardization and conformity.<sup>15</sup> George R. Brunk, the Virginia bishop and a leader of the conservative coalition expressed their credo in a 1920 letter, to H. S. Bender: "We have a closed policy as to all that the Bible teaches—all that the church rules—all that a Bishop

12 Theron F. Schlabach, "Reveille for 'Die Stillen im Lande': A Stir Among Mennonites in the Late Nineteenth Century," *MQR*, LI (1977), 226.

13 The elements of this interpretation are elsewhere suggested. Norman C. Kraus, "American Mennonites and the Bible, 1750-1950," *MQR*, XLI (1967), 309-29 notes the relationship of fundamentalism to the centralizing of authority. Sawatsky, "History and Ideology," 114-15 and elsewhere has clearly shown the linkage of fundamentalist theology with cultural nonconformity and the centralization of authority. Hostetler, "Franconia Mennonite Conference and American Protestant Movements," Ch. 8, suggests all three elements as the Franconia response to fundamentalism. The three were the means for keeping fundamentalism at bay. This interpretation suggests rather that fundamentalism was the enactment of the three movements.

14 The story of the closing of Goshen College is found in John Umble, *Goshen College, 1894-1954: A Mennonite Venture in Christian Higher Education* (Goshen, Ind.: Goshen College, 1955) and Sawatsky, "History and Ideology." While neither link fundamentalism and the cultural transition together in the fashion of this essay, both do note the relationship between the theological and cultural issues. Both also tell the entire story in considerable detail.

15 See, for example, Daniel Kauffman, *The Mennonite Church and Current Issues* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1923); Sawatsky, "History and Ideology," 158-59; Daniel Kauffman, "Outlook," *Gospel Herald*, April 19, 1923, p. 50; John E. Hartzler, *Education Among the Mennonites* (Danvers, Ill.: The Central Mennonite Publishing Board, 1925), 146; Samuel Burkhard quoted in *ibid.*, 147; Paul Whitmer, *Autobiography*, Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen College, 80. The same theme runs through the private correspondence of the period. For example, see George R. Brunk to Harold S. Bender, Sept. 6, 1929, Harold S. Bender Collection, Correspondence 1/6, Archives of the Mennonite Church; Harold S. Bender to Oscar Burkholder, Oct. 7, 1920, Bender Collection, Correspondence 1/9; Allen Erb to Harold S. Bender, Nov. 2, 1926, Bender Collection, Correspondence 1/14.

rules.”<sup>16</sup> And indeed it seemed to many that the standards of the church were the infallible ones. At stake were not the original standards but rather the formulations of the turn of the century and after as the church sought to stem the drift into the world.

The closing of Goshen College in 1923 was closely linked to the problems of the Indiana-Michigan Conference.<sup>17</sup> At issue were questions of congregational autonomy and district authority. The Executive Committee of the Conference sought to enforce more strictly the conventions on dress and life insurance. Six ministers withdrew rather than participate in the retrenchment on these forms of nonconformity. Four hundred members withdrew from the college congregation and surrounding congregations. J. C. Wenger, the historian of the Indiana-Michigan district notes that during the twenties the Conference lost an eighth of its members.<sup>18</sup>

The charges of theological modernism were certainly swirling in the church during the same time. In 1924 John Horsch released his explosive *Mennonite Church and Modernism*<sup>19</sup> in which he identified the infected individuals and institutions. Leading the pack of modernists were the former Goshen College faculty, who, ever since the 1913 resignation of Noah Byers and C. Henry Smith, drifted to Bluffton College and Witmarsum Seminary. Horsch's battle was not with MC Mennonites. It was with the exiles. But his intended audience was the MC people who might be attracted to the progressive Mennonite vision that Bluffton and Witmarsum represented. The pages of the *Gospel Herald*, the official denominational periodical; the *Christian Exponent*, the voice of the exiles at Bluffton between 1924-28; the emergence of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* at the new Goshen College in 1926; and finally the coming of the *Sword and Trumpet* in 1929, the voice of the conservatives in the East—all provided lively discussions and even charges and countercharges on a range of fundamentalist-modernist questions.

The dialogue with theological modernism was clearly going on with MC Mennonites. Yet it cannot be separated from the dialogue about cultural modernism. The interplay between those advocating a clearly articulated and fundamental theology and those advocating church authority and cultural nonconformity was strong. The three emphases collectively worked to draw the boundaries of the MC tradition. The boundaries were permeable, to be sure, yet they were sufficiently strong to hold congregational autonomy, theological latitude and cultural adaptation in check.<sup>20</sup>

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16 George R. Brunk to Harold S. Bender, June 16, 1920, Bender Collection, Correspondence 1/6.

17 See Daniel Kauffman, "Outlook."

18 John C. Wenger, *The Mennonites in Indiana and Michigan* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1961), 42-43.

19 John Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1924).

20 See Juhnke, "Anti-Modernism and Boundary Maintenance in a Consolidating Denomination," for an interesting discussion of how fundamentalism was a form of boundary maintenance for MC Mennonites.

The conflict at Bethel College in 1916-20 paralleled the larger anxiety of the German Mennonite community during World War I. The books and articles of James Juhnke have amply documented the psychic and institutional crisis that this segment of the Mennonite world experienced.<sup>21</sup> Caught in the double dilemma of being German in a war fought against the Germans and being pacifist in a society notably militarized created a set of issues different from that of the Swiss-Mennonite community in Indiana.

World War I was a time of reappraisal for the GC Mennonites. Their rapid acculturation into the political, cultural and economic sectors of Kansas society brought with it participation and identification with that society. By threatening these gains, World War I introduced new pressures.

Bethel College itself was not untouched by these pressures. German classes were dropped and instruction in other classes switched to English. C. C. Regier, Professor of History and one of those later tainted with modernism wrote in September 1918 that it was easier to comply with the demands of the Loyalty League "than to erect a new college building."<sup>22</sup> His comment was more than idle paranoia. Another Mennonite college only twenty-five miles away had burned down only five months previous.

J. H. Langenwalter, a two-time president of Bethel College recalled that 1919 at the college was particularly trying because of the war experiences, which disoriented Mennonites. Years later he wrote, "Mennonite stock had reached a low ebb . . . as a result of the war and of the conduct of some Mennonites."<sup>23</sup> People were embarrassed by their complicity in the purchase of war bonds. Others had been swindled out of considerable monies through the loss of their bonds. The turmoil of the parents was reflected in the dissatisfaction of the students.<sup>24</sup>

P. J. Wedel and E. G. Kaufman, the official historians of Bethel College, begin their discussion of the "stormy" years there by noting that the war rekindled memories deep in the Mennonite soul of earlier persecutions by the faithful at the "hands of the educated clergy." Those memories "had gradually crystallized into a conviction that higher education and some of the fundamental principles for which the Mennonite church stood were irreconcilable." Anyone venturing into higher educa-

21 See James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1975); James C. Juhnke, "The Agony of Civil Isolation: Mennonites in World War I," *Mennonite Life*, Jan., 1970, 27-33; James C. Juhnke, "Mennonite Benevolence and Civic Identity: The Post-war Compromise," *Mennonite Life*, Jan., 1970, 34-37.

22 C. C. Regier to Frank J. Balzer, Sept. 15, 1918, quoted in Delores Reimer, "Jacob Frank Balzer and the Experience at Bethel College, 1913-1918" (student paper, Bethel College, 1974).

23 J. H. Langenwalter, "A Biography of Conviction," typescript copy prepared by Harley Stucky, p. 107, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College.

24 *Ibid.*, 102-10.

tion was thus subjected to "the closest scrutiny and became a target for the arrows of mistrust and suspicion."<sup>25</sup>

The war had been a bitter experience and there were among the Bethel College faculty those who had embraced the war and its crusading rhetoric. J. F. Balzer, Instructor in Bible from 1913-18 and Dean from 1914-18, shared the progressive vision that the war was necessary and that it would be the war to end all wars. He avidly read the *New Republic* and, as he described it, "pushed hard" its endorsement of the war. He was drafted as a 4 Minute Man and during the war sought to work with the War Council of the YMCA but was refused because of his German and Mennonite connections. He protested to his theological mentor, Shailer Matthews at the University of Chicago, that his position on the war was clean and that he should not be refused service.<sup>26</sup> Samuel Burkhard, who succeeded Balzer as Acting Dean for the troubled 1918-19 term, wrote to Balzer in late 1918 that he had given a speech to the Loyalty League that "was hot enough to please all of them. . . . I waived all consideration as a C.O., Not much of a Mennonite but I hope a Christian, at least moving in the direction of the religion of Jesus."<sup>27</sup>

The modernist debate began at Bethel in 1916 with Gustav Enss objecting to a J. F. Balzer chapel address which questioned the date and authorship of the book of Daniel. Enss was subsequently dismissed and seemed to be a fundamentalist casualty in the debate. In the process, however, he focused the issue of modernism at Bethel precisely when the college was edging toward a closer affiliation with the Western District Conference.<sup>28</sup>

In the next four years the district assumed control of the Board of Directors and moved toward more clearly defined churchly oversight. The assertion of control resulted in the issuance of a statement of "Rules and Regulations" and the articulation of a Board of Directors statement of belief to the 1919 meeting of the Western District Conference.<sup>29</sup> The "Rules and Regulations" required the signing of a creedal statement before employment, which, while reining in the liberals, was hardly a fundamentalist creed. It required belief in "the deity of Jesus Christ and the inspiration of the Scriptures" and an acknowledgment of "the Scriptures, Old and New Testament, as the word of God." It further elaborated the doctrine of inspiration by noting that "the biblical accounts of miracles are reports of real occurrences. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Peter J. Wedel, *The Story of Bethel College*, ed. Edmund G. Kaufman (North Newton, Kan.: Bethel College, 1954), 241.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob F. Balzer to Shailer Matthews, July 15, 1918, Jacob F. Balzer Collection, Box 2, Folder 29, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College. On Balzer's career at Bethel, see Reimer, "Jacob Frank Balzer and the Experience at Bethel College, 1913-1918."

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Burkhard to Balzer, December 22, 1918, Balzer Collection, Box 2, Folder 29.

<sup>28</sup> Sawatsky, "History and Ideology," 146.

<sup>29</sup> The original copy of the "Rules and Regulations" was drawn up by H. P. Krehbiel and is in the H. P. Krehbiel Collection, Box 12, Folder 242, Mennonite Library and Archives.

<sup>30</sup> *Minutes of the Western District Conference*, English translation (Beatrice, Neb., Nov. 5-7, 1919), p. 37. English translation is available at Mennonite Library and Archives.

Moderate forms of theological modernism were present at Bethel. J. F. Balzer ideologically identified with his mentor, Shailer Matthews, and used his writings as texts in various courses.<sup>31</sup> David H. Richert, Professor of Astronomy and Mathematics, edged towards a historicist understanding of the nature of revelation. The Scriptures were clearly the word of God, but it was sometimes difficult to separate them from other literature of the time:

If the books that comprise the Bible had been documents DICTATED by God, then these men [early church leaders] should not have had any trouble in recognizing them as being different from ordinary sacred literature of the time, but such was not the case.<sup>32</sup>

The new "Rules and Regulations" clearly distinguished between the sacred and secular subjects. No limitations were specified on secular subjects. "However on biblical, doctrinal, philosophical, historical and sociological subjects it is expected of every member of the Faculty that his teachings shall be in agreement with the views held by the Mennonite denomination."<sup>33</sup> Rendered by the conservatives and in the context of rising fundamentalism, it was a breach of academic and religious freedom that resulted in a bitter quarrel between the faculty and the board. C. C. Regier, history professor, found the distinction "purely medieval and . . . long since . . . disregarded by all thinking people. The same God who caused the Bible to be written also created the earth and everything that's in it."<sup>34</sup> Samuel Burkhard thought the rules incompatible with faith: "'He that putteth his hands to the plow,' and looks back for his rules and directions 'is not fit for the kingdom.' No man can live and have his life circumscribed by rules."<sup>35</sup>

Their protests fell on deaf ears. By the spring of 1919 Burkhard and Regier had been dismissed. A. B. Schmidt and J. F. Balzer resigned and a year later President J. W. Kliever also resigned in protest over the implementation of the "Rules and Regulations."

For both J. F. Balzer and J. H. Langenwalter the conflict was to be understood in cultural rather than theological terms. The Mennonite world was changing and the nature of education required for the youth was not that of the past. J. H. Langenwalter, twice president, can hardly be thought of theologically or culturally as a modernist. Yet he thought the college could either "face the new age as Christian men and women ought to" or return to older patterns of authority and tradition.<sup>36</sup> The wedge that separated these differing conceptions was the war. He wrote

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31 Balzer to E. G. Kaufman, Nov. 19, 1951, E. G. Kaufman College Papers, Correspondence Series, Box 45, Folder 11, Mennonite Library and Archives.

32 D. H. Richert to P. H. Richert, April 12, 1919 in Krehbiel Collection, Box 37, Folder 240.

33 "Rules and Regulations," in Krehbiel Collection, Box 12, Folder 242.

34 C. C. Regier to the Board of Directors, Jan. 27, 1919, in Krehbiel Collection, Box 37, Folder 240.

35 Samuel Burkhard to the Board of Directors, Jan. 27, 1919, *Ibid.*

36 J. H. Langenwalter to J. F. Balzer, March 4, 1920, Balzer Collection, Box 2, Folder 30.

to Balzer, "to many of our people are merely glad that the war is over and go at things as tho the world were merely what it was 6 years ago—and those who ought to lead—are playing upon this misconception of things."<sup>37</sup>

J. F. Balzer was troubled because the college was being blamed for changes that were beyond its control. The older generation did "not realize, of course, that the americanization of the young people is moving in rapid strides and that we as a school are in a sense not americanizing them but merely directing the forces present."<sup>38</sup> He found the situation analogous to what was happening at Goshen College, which by 1919 had lost two presidents and two deans to Bluffton. Balzer thought they were "capable, consecrated and genuine" but the church could not find room for them. They were outside of the MC world not because of theological liberalism but because of the older leadership that could not "successfully weld together the old and the new." The old and new were differing generations, products of different experiences. What was needed was a mediating position between the two. Balzer resigned because he could not find the centrist position.<sup>39</sup>

The fundamentalist/modernist conflict erupted differently among the Mennonite Brethren and at Tabor College. The open conflict virtually began with the ascendancy of P. E. Schellenberg to the presidency in 1942 and ended with his resignation in 1951. But the roots of the story go back to the eclectic nature of MB theology and to the story of a generation spurned in the 1920s.

Since the inception of the group in 1860 Mennonite Brethren theology has drawn from Anabaptist, Pietist and evangelical sources.<sup>40</sup> This openness to varying theological formulations permitted an easy entrance of fundamentalist notions. The Mennonite Brethren have always considered themselves conservative; they have historically identified with the revivalist tradition that was part of the fundamentalist program. Identification with theological fundamentalism was largely unreflective and with virtually no discussion of its relationship to the other theologies that have nourished the tradition.<sup>41</sup>

If there was theological pluralism—albeit conservative—among the Brethren, they preserved a cultural isolation farther into the twentieth century than did the GC Mennonites. The language shift from German

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> J. F. Balzer to Shailer Matthews, Jan. 7, 1917, Balzer Collection, Box 2, Folder 29

<sup>39</sup> J. F. Balzer to H. P. Krehbiel, Feb. 3, 1919, Krehbiel Collection, Box 37, Folder 240; J. F. Balzer to J. H. Langenwalter, March 6, 1920 and J. F. Balzer to J. W. Kliewer, April 21, 1920. Both cited in Reimer, "Jacob Frank Balzer and the Experience at Bethel College, 1913-1918."

<sup>40</sup> Abram J. Klassen, "The Roots and Development of Mennonite Brethren Theology to 1914" (M A. thesis, Wheaton College, 1966); Albert J. Wardin, Jr., "Baptist Influences on Mennonite Brethren with an Emphasis on The Practice of Immersion," *Direction*, VIII (1979), 33-38.

<sup>41</sup> John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, Cal.: Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 375-376.

to English is symptomatic. For German-speaking GC Mennonites the transition came on the heels of World War I. For MB Mennonites the transition came during World War II and through the 1940s.<sup>42</sup>

The delayed language transition reflects a larger pattern of cultural insularity that made the fundamentalist-modernist debate of the larger Protestant world something foreign until the 1940s. The first serious discussion of theological modernism came with a paper by A. G. Willems, "How to Detect the First Signs of Modernism," read at a ministers' conference in 1946. The reprinting of the article in 1947 in a two-part series in the *Christian Leader*, the official English language periodical of the denomination, and two subsequent articles in the 1950s constitute the corpus of formal discussion of modernism in MB literature.<sup>43</sup>

The assumption throughout the 1920s, 1930s and into the early 1940s was that the Brethren had not been touched by modernism. Both the General Conference sessions and the various regional conference sessions repeatedly assured themselves that Tabor was unlike other schools that had been penetrated by liberal theology.<sup>44</sup>

The tenor changed abruptly with the installation of Schellenberg as president. He was the first president to hold a Ph.D. He was the first nonordained president. He had no record as a churchman. He spoke the language of the academy and the church. He would straddle the two worlds in ways unlike previous presidents.<sup>45</sup>

The story of his demise lies in the cultural isolation and theological constriction of his people. The experience of four Tabor graduates between 1912-18 who subsequently attended Yale Divinity School and returned to teach at Tabor during the twenties illustrates both themes.

Adolph Frantz taught at the College between 1924-27 and left because the milieu was both "static and progressive, laudable and yet intellectually disturbing."<sup>46</sup> The college could not integrate the findings of modern science with religious faith. "The concept that truth revealed to man through religion and that discovered by scientists . . . are both grounded in the very being of the Creator was greeted with skepticism. There lurked the suspicion that scientists only too often were trying to destroy the belief in God and replace Him with a self-energizing process."<sup>47</sup>

42 *Ibid.*, 172; Samuel Floyd Pannabecker, *Open Doors: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1975), 325-26.

43 A. G. Willems, "How to Detect the First Signs of Modernism," *Christian Leader*, Feb. 15, 1947, 1-4 and March 1, 1947, 5-6; A. H. Unruh, "Der Apostel Paulus unter den Pharisäern und Sadduzäern," *Voice*, I (Sept.-Oct. 1962), 1-4; H. H. Janzen, "Der Modernismus," *Voice*, V (Jan.-Feb. 1956), 1-5.

44 See, for example, *Yearbook of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Mountain Lake, Minn., 1919, and Henderson, Neb., 1927); *Yearbooks of the Pacific District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Lodi, Cal. 1920, and Shafter, Cal. 1927).

45 J. B. Toews, "The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Brethren Theology," *Direction*, X (1981), 20-29.

46 Adolph I. Frantz, *Water from the Well: The Recollections of a Former Plowboy* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Dorrance Press, 1978), 129.

47 *Ibid.*

M. S. Schlichting found the general cultural and intellectual conservatism of the Hillsboro community too confining. He wrote to P. S. Goertz, a fellow Yalie, that the churches were quarreling about unimportant matters: "One cannot tell what may happen. Maybe nothing, all may become stagnant and die."<sup>48</sup> Goertz responded with sympathy. He realized that people in a village "were inclined to be very provincial and to make a lot of unimportant matters. . . . That is likely to be true of a place like Hillsboro." But he pleaded with Schlichting to make the "sacrifice" and stay to bring "enlightenment."<sup>49</sup> He did, for seven years.

Goertz was himself prepared to make the sacrifice. He taught at Tabor from 1927-30. At the beginning of his last year he wrote to his mentor, Kenneth S. Latourette at Yale, requesting an alternative job. Tabor had become unacceptable because "there is no little opposition to real scholarship such as a first class college should encourage. A narrow spirit of Fundamentalism is hard at work. No teacher, though evangelical and warm as well as Christo-centric, will be safe on the faculty if he accepts any results of modern scholarship."<sup>50</sup>

The loss of the Yalies coupled with the exodus that accompanied the 1931 reduction of the college to junior college status resulted in an intellectual attrition from which recovery would be long in coming. These three men were the generation that might have articulated an alternative to the unconscious but persistent drift into fundamentalist mindsets.

P. E. Schellenberg was one of those who left Tabor in 1931. He returned in 1941 as dean and became the fourth president in 1942. He came back to Tabor at the same time that a new generation of aspiring ministers and teachers were starting what became a two-decade flow of MB students to Central Baptist Seminary in Kansas City. By 1950 twelve Tabor graduates had been at Central.<sup>51</sup> This new generation yearned for more precision and greater clarity in theological formulation and were more aware of the divergent theologies of American Protestantism and more vigilant to the evils of modernism, even in its most rudimentary form.

During the second year of Schellenberg's presidency the questioning began. At an MB General Conference session in 1943 he was requested to testify to his own religious experience and to declare publicly the limits of his discipline, psychology.<sup>52</sup> The Committee of Reference and Council, the Conference in interim, followed with several days of discussion with the Educational Committee on the college and the president's orthodoxy.

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48 M. S. Schlichting to P. S. Goertz, Dec. 7, 1925, P. S. Goertz Collection, Box 1, Folder a9, Mennonite Library and Archives.

49 P. S. Goertz to M. S. Schlichting, Jan. 6, 1926, *ibid.*

50 P. S. Goertz to Kenneth Scott Latourette, October 28, 1929, Goertz Collection, Box 2, Folder a12.

51 *Tabor College Bulletin*, Jan. 1950, 1.

52 *Yearbook of the 42nd General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Buhler, Kan., 1943), 47.

The issue was the compatibility of biblical insights and scientific investigation. The former president, A. E. Janzen, thought there was a "constant conflict in an institution where both spiritual and intellectual teachings are present." G. B. Huebert, pastor of the largest church, feared inevitable conflict between the "bible department" and the "intellectual department." One member asked whether "psychoanalysis could be taught with a Christian emphasis." Another inquired, "What do you think of a teacher who wrote his thesis in hypnotism?"<sup>53</sup>

The issues were raised by the social sciences. Modernism was creeping in through them, not through biblical studies as at Goshen and Bethel. At stake was not the inspiration of the Scriptures or God's role in the creation of the universe but rather the relationship of biblical and scientific explanations. If there was an implicit challenge to the authority of the biblical tradition, it was that the sciences provided alternative explanations for human behavior. The seeming diminishment of the biblical tradition was here the indirect consequence of entering the world of modern scholarship and intellectual pluralism.

In 1951 P. E. Schellenberg finally resigned after nine troubled years. That was long enough to have "a louse gnawing at one's body," as he once earlier described his fate.<sup>54</sup> He was clearly no modernist. Even his critics subsequently realized that.<sup>55</sup> He was the symbolic target in a larger, more bewildering transition.

The 1951 General Conference of MB churches meeting several months after his resignation reflected the larger transition. The Committee of Reference and Counsel presented an extended analysis of the state of the church. The point of departure was the "revolutionizing changes of the political, social and economic life" during the preceding decade.<sup>56</sup> A more precise rendering of the changes noted that the church heretofore had largely been insulated from "modern philosophies, various theological schools and rapid social changes through language and culture."<sup>57</sup> That mixture now threatened the "purity, unity and strength" of the church.<sup>58</sup>

The response to the cultural and theological changes was similar to the MC response to the awakening. The Committee recommended the creation of a Board of Elders, the preparation of a supplement to the Confession of Faith, and the writing of three authorized books on the

<sup>53</sup> Minutes of the Committee of Reference and Council, Jan. 17-18, 1945, in Board of Reference and Council Files, A220-283, Folder 5, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno.

<sup>54</sup> P. E. Schellenberg to Educational Committee, Oct. 23, 1947, P. E. Schellenberg Collection, Board of Education files-1947, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Hillsboro.

<sup>55</sup> See statement by William Neufeld, July 25, 1980, on deposit with Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno.

<sup>56</sup> *Yearbook of the 45th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Winkler, Man., 1951), 126.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

theology, the polity and the history of the church. Theology was to be more clearly codified, authority centralized and the cultural changes kept in check.

The theology that had crept into the church was clearly not modernism. The committee went on record reaffirming the "absence of rank modernism in our pulpits."<sup>59</sup> Fundamentalism had come not in response to theological modernism but as part of the larger cultural transition. The loosening of traditional forms of authority, the shift from the lay to the professional ministry and the greater participation in the social order brought uncertainty—even anxiety—and also theological fundamentalism. In the transitional moment it was easy to misperceive the threats and to purge those who more clearly embodied something of the new order that would soon engulf the entire church.

All of these episodes of fundamentalist controversy at Goshen, Bethel and Tabor and in their supporting denominations suggest that fundamentalism can be understood at least partly as a transitional response that emerged during or immediately following alterations in the relationship between Mennonites and American culture. Theologically and culturally it was an antidote to rapid cultural change. For those who grasped fundamentalism in either form, it was a response of sureness to an unsettled condition.

This interpretation of the social function of fundamentalism in the three colleges and their supporting peoples suggests a way of understanding the outbursts of the fundamentalist movement. It does not explain the role or persistence of fundamentalist theology in Mennonite theologizing. There are hints, however, that fundamentalism may also be thought of as a transitional theology between what Norman Kraus has called "pretheological biblicism" and "theological biblicism."<sup>60</sup> After an initial stage in theologizing when fundamentalist categories seemed appropriate, they were largely discarded as Mennonites moved to differing forms of theological biblicism.

As the Mennonite boundaries became more permeable, as the cultural shifts were navigated, and as newer theological formulations, largely rooted in the rediscovery of the historic tradition, emerged, the need for fundamentalism diminished. A body of theory suggests that there is a point in the modernization process when large numbers of people feeling adrift seek more rigid forms of authority and order.<sup>61</sup> Marsden suggests that fundamentalism was that for numerous Americans.<sup>62</sup> Mennonites seem no exception.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Norman C. Kraus, "American Mennonites and the Bible, 1750-1950," 317ff. See also Sawatsky, "History and Ideology."

<sup>61</sup> Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), Ch. 9 works out an application of this theory to an earlier religious group in transition.

<sup>62</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 227.