

# ON NOT GOING UNDER: IMMERSION AND THE MENNONITE BRETHREN IDENTITY CRISIS

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## A FIRST EFFUSION

I hoped that the indignation I felt was righteous, because I was determined to be bold. I was standing with the microphone in my hand and had been designated the next speaker, but the delegate before me got the resolution tabled. Though frustrated, I was also relieved. The first statement of counsel presented by the Board of Reference and Counsel (BORAC) had called for "corrective criticism," but it had also asked that it be coupled with affirmation. At that moment, I could see nothing to affirm.

Certainly the "Resolution on ordination/baptism of pastors" could not be affirmed by anyone. When I first read it, I had felt sorry for those who agreed with its main point (that Mennonite Brethren churches should continue to require rebaptism of those seeking ordination whose earlier believer's baptism had not been by immersion). They deserved a better defense of their position. Surely so feeble an argument could only have been put together by someone secretly determined to sabotage the practice ostensibly being defended.<sup>1</sup> But some of the responses during the discussion on the conference floor were even less "affirmable." I had three points to make.

First, I was going to ask BORAC to clarify Rationale 4 in the resolution:

4. We agree that a case can be made from a theological point of view that immersion is not the essence of baptism; but the willingness of

*Immersion  
lies at the  
surface of the  
current debate.  
If we dip  
more deeply  
we find ...*

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our ordained leaders to comply with the polity of the conference leads us to affirm our historic position.

The first clause can have at least three very different meanings:

- (1) We are in theological agreement: immersion is not the essence of baptism.
- (2) We note that there are important theological arguments, presumably balancing arguments for the contrary case.
- (3) We grant that at least a few (“far out”?) people have argued theologically that immersion is not the essence of baptism.

The second clause of the rationale, a complete *non sequitur* seems to rule out (2), for then a following theological debate would have been necessary to rule out one of the cases. Two speakers from the floor who referred to the rationale simply took it for granted that (1) was the intended meaning and used it to argue against requiring rebaptisms.

On the other hand, a strong case can be made that (3) was the intended meaning. The first rationale claims that such rebaptism “is in keeping with our Confession of Faith.” If so, then there would seem to be theological arguments linking immersion to the essence of baptism. Besides, when the entire resolution was read the BORAC spokesperson had strongly emphasized the “can” — “a case *can* be made...” And the speaker’s tone implied disbelief that anyone should be so misled as to try to make it.

But if (3) is the correct interpretation of BORAC’s intention, then that Board needs to be reminded that just over twenty years ago it had argued for (1) to justify accepting *any* of the non-immersed without rebaptism. If (3) is right, the non-immersed are unbaptized, and we have been accepting them as members for two decades.

At the very least, the Conference has the right to demand clarification. One would expect clear and coherent rationales for any position important enough to warrant a resolution.

This leads to the second criticism which I thought ought to be made. I was upset not only because the “theologizing” had been confused but, even worse, that it was not held to be important at all.

At one point, to account for BORAC’s surprise at the volume of opposition to the resolution, the one leading the session blamed those churches which had not answered their earlier request for responses to the proposed resolution. In effect, he was complaining that the 147 responses that had come in had not been an adequate sampling to gauge what the churches wanted. He thus made very clear what had been implied all along. This issue was to be decided by majority vote based on old and new sentiments, not on a consensus discovered through careful thought and prayer.

Not even the eighty-three “qualifying statements” from the churches which did respond stimulated BORAC to deal with the doctrinal issues. Yet in the resolution they grouped these eighty-three responses under four headings — all of which were doctrinal in nature. One of these four headings was the question whether the mode of baptism is its essence. A significant number of churches asked BORAC to answer that question. Yet Rationale 4

(quoted above) sidestepped this plea with the astonishing claim that we can ignore this theological point since those who have agreed to be rebaptized have indeed agreed to be rebaptized.

I had intended to summarize this criticism by insisting that BORAC is supposed to teach and to lead, not to be an in-house Gallup poll.

My third criticism was that immersion baptism was being cheapened. At several points the *defenders* of the resolution insisted that “of course” such rebaptisms were *not* a denial of the validity of non-immersion baptisms. The rebaptism by immersion which we demand is “for *our* sake, not God’s or theirs.”

In order to give integrity to such immersions — to make them mean what we intend them to mean, I was going to suggest the following formula.

“Do you love the Mennonite Brethren Church with all your heart and believe in faithfully practicing all its forms?”

“I do”

“On the basis of this confession of your commitment to our sensibilities, I *immerse* you in the name of the history, the tradition, and the sentiment of our peoplehood. Amen.”

## A SUBSEQUENT IMMERSION

I had boiled down all three points to a single scribbled sheet. I am glad, I think, that I did not get the chance to read it. That night the adrenalin was still flowing too strongly to permit easy sleep, so I sat down to rethink the day. I thought (and still think) that what I intended to say needed saying. There was nothing *on the surface* of what was presented to us that could be affirmed. But it became clearer to me that the surface can not be the real issue. I decided to try to go below the surface to work out what pressures could lead BORAC and the rest of us to such confusion.

### *The Symbolic Significance of Baptism for Mennonites*

Ever since the sixteenth century, baptism among Mennonites has had to carry a heavy symbolic load. There are at least four levels to which it is the witness. It represents a cleansing from sin. This was, perhaps, its most important content for the New Testament Church. Also important in the New Testament is the linkage of baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Mennonites have been generally unsure about these aspects of baptism, but our historic biblicism has kept them at least guiltily present in our consciousness, and they continue to be noted by theologians. Sprinkling or pouring effectively symbolize these aspects.

More importantly, baptism has symbolized participation in Jesus’ death and in resurrection with him to a new life of discipleship in the pattern of his life. Because this new life must continue within the Church as the body of Christ, it is also the ritual for becoming members of a local congregation.

When adults are converted and come to the Church from the outside, all these elements may coalesce and culminate in an immediately ensuing bap-

tism. Such a coalescence of events and symbol is rare. In fact, by delaying baptism to “test” a conversion, many Mennonites tacitly agree that it is undesirable.

The symbolic significance of baptism becomes especially ambiguous for those who have grown up in Christian communities. In a very real sense, these have always “belonged” to the Church. The early Church quickly moved to baptizing children to symbolize this, equating it to Jewish circumcision. Because Anabaptism stressed adult decision, Mennonites have not been free to accept this solution. In fact, they did not need to do so as long as they lived in segregated communities, as in Russia. Everyone knew that everyone “belonged,” and baptism (often just before marriage) actuated their adult decision to be actively what they had passively always been. And so, unlike other Christian communions, Mennonites did not develop other rituals to symbolize the different stages of the maturation of young Christians.

### *The Symbolic Significance of Immersion for Mennonite Brethren*

In 1860, in Russia, the first Mennonite Brethren rejected aspects of the Mennonite ethos which they believed had too much divorced Christian beliefs from spiritual life and Christian ideals from practice. A revival broke out, and they claimed release from the dead weight of custom and sin and received a gospel to proclaim to others, a new power to practice what they had always been taught, and a new joy in living out a new and freeing kind of discipleship.

Like the ancient Israelites, they had been covered by the blood during a spiritual death watch and had emerged to freedom through the waters of a dangerous sea. And then they discovered immersion to symbolize this death and resurrection to new life. And immersion became the ritual by which they entered newly-formed congregations.

But something else happened to this first generation. They were persecuted by some of the other Mennonites, especially by some members of the Mennonite “establishment”; and immersion baptism took on yet another meaning to all of the meanings which they had inherited and discovered. It symbolized their separation from the “Egypt” of the other Mennonites. But their “Red Sea” delivery was problematic because, although they escaped a spiritual bondage, the “other side” was physically the same place. They even worked hard to convince Russian officials that they were only partially distinct from other Mennonites. In most respects they intended to remain “Egyptian”! Immersion kept their relative distinctness — and therefore their identity — very clear. It would have been unthinkable to relax its practice in any way.

### *The Many Meanings of the Present Resolution*

The years have passed. The elements which baptism symbolizes have come to be experienced differently by different ones of us. Those of us gathered in Reedley last October came to the debate with very different concepts of the points at issue. There can be no consensus until these

differing ideas are understood and dealt with. I will discuss only one aspect of all the sub-surface currents which confuse the surface of our debates on baptism, and I will do so by asking what constitutes our "Egypt." The following analysis is offered as an hypothesis needing testing.

(1) *One group of us continues to live among other Mennonites, and these Mennonites continue to constitute our "Egypt."* These other Mennonites, especially "General Conference" (GC) Mennonites, continue to represent the other Russian Mennonites. For this group, immersion continues to symbolize our distinctive way to be Anabaptist and Mennonite. It carries the sense of what constitutes MB identity.

That the General Conference was the result of a revival and reform movement which paralleled the MB movement in Russia has not made them this group's allies. In fact, many of the other Russians joined the GC Conference upon immigrating. That, plus certain real differences between important elements in our respective conferences, has been enough to burden the GC's with the onus of the inherited guilt of Russian Mennonites and their "establishment." Besides, they "sprinkle."

A number of years ago the GC Conference lovingly (but illogically) apologized to us for the sins of that long-dead Russian "establishment." I suppose that Group (1) accepted it with grim satisfaction. But the real history of the GCs and their similarity to us only makes them a greater threat, as was also true of the other Russian Mennonites when revival spread beyond the new MB circles. "Redeemed" Mennonites who did not join us were a greater challenge to our still shaky identity than the "unredeemed" had been. Their existence brought into question the need for continuing separateness — and perhaps even cast doubt on the necessity of the original separation.

In brief, Group (1) continues to intend to be followers "of our dear Brother Menno." For them immersion remains the symbol of our special "MB" identity. Therefore it continues to be the justification of our relative separateness from other Mennonites. This group was opposed to the decision to accept non-immersed laity that was made over twenty years ago. They continue to be affronted by that decision.

(2) *Another group of us continues to live among other Mennonites and also wishes to remain Mennonite.* Much of the non-Mennonite world and a few other Mennonites constitute their "Egypt." More or less like-minded lay Mennonites are their natural allies. For them, immersion continues to be a distinctively MB symbol; but since they no longer doubt the validity of the existence of our denomination, their "Mennoniteness" overrides the need for immersion to symbolize their own religious identity. They are very happy to share their pews with non-immersed laity.

But this broadmindedness is not extended to the clergy. Whether or not they continue to hold non-MB clergy responsible for the original Russian establishment's nastiness, they at least insist that clergy ought to continue to embody the meaning of their churches. Therefore, MB clergy must incarnate MB doctrinal purity and moral rigorousness, and they must be immersed.

Two generations ago, this group was numerous enough to accept several Ontario congregations containing non-immersed members. Just over twenty years ago they were strong enough to vote the acceptance of non-immersed lay individuals. They insisted, at that time, that the claims of "fellowship" overrode the claims of "theology." They are "Mennonite" enough to worship freely with the sprinkled and "theological" enough to insist that their ministers fully represent the MB essence. They are impatient with those who insist on dragging theology into public discussions. They wish to vote on the basis of "fellowship" and to leave the theologians to debate important esoterica among themselves. Their own leadership initiatives are likely to be exercised in local and regional chapters of MCC, MDS, and other inter-Mennonite lay organizations.

The surface reason given for requiring the distinction between clergy and laity is that non-immersed pastors could not sincerely immerse others. Can only married clergy sincerely marry the couples who stand before them? Did the non-immersed Jacob Becker validly immerse Heinrich Bartel at the first MB immersion? (Becker was then immersed by Bartel so that he would feel free to baptize three others who had asked to be immersed. The feeling that immersion should be by the immersed runs deep.) I think that only powerful but unstated convictions of the separate status of ministers could give this argument a shred of legitimacy. But to state this reason aloud is to risk losing it, for that distinction is denied by "official" Mennonite theology.

(3) *Perhaps this is the place to suggest the logical possibility of a group for whom "Egypt" is whatever detracts from biblical precedence and doctrinal orthodoxy.* These would strive to decide the issue on the basis of a truth divorced from history and from all sub-surface currents. Whether or not their MB identity would be secure, it would certainly not be linked to a mode of baptism. That such objectivity is possible is not any longer easily believed. If they exist, they do not seem to have had any "political" importance among us.

(4) *For another group, their essential personal and religious identity has been narrowed to those specific aspects of their MB and Mennonite heritage which link Mennonites to the modern heirs of pietism.* Having differentiated between desirable and undesirable Mennonite beliefs and practices, they have also differentiated between Mennonites, whether inside or outside their own denominations. For them, "Egypt" is both "narrow" ethnicism and "left-wing" Anabaptism. They are impatient with the conservatism of Mennonite institutions and suspicious of "liberal" academics and leaders. Thus, during the discussion of a different item, one pastor warned against "liberal" Foundation Sunday School materials. He had not studied that curriculum. His source, and actual ally, was a neighboring GC pastor. Though immersion may be seen by them as a significant symbol, they can be impatient with modes which hinder them from allying freely with other Mennonites who share in their streamlined version of Mennonitism.

(5) *Another group of MBs are the self-conscious heirs of the movement to define the Anabaptist Vision.* Like Group (4), they also differentiate between desirable and undesirable beliefs and practices. For these, "Egypt" represents

those forces which would swamp what they take to be our special witness to the world. They also find their allies among the like-minded, with whom they hope to counter the trend toward a "worldly" evangelicalism in all Mennonite groups. These are opposed to the demand for rebaptism and are offended by the un-Anabaptist distinction between the ordained and the non-ordained which our baptismal practice reinforces. Finally, they are appalled that Mennonites may abandon their theological distinctives at the very moment that sharply growing numbers of non-Mennonites are discovering the persuasiveness of those ideals.

(6) *There are a growing number of MBs who no longer live among large concentrations of Mennonites — or who, at any rate, wish they did not.* They are members of MB congregations who are trying to attract transfers and to make converts from their non-Mennonite world. For them, anything that smacks of Mennonite distinctives, whether ethnic or theological, distracts potential members. Mennonitism as such, whether MB or not, is the quaint and embarrassing "Egypt" from which they wish to be delivered. They want to be like presently fashionable "worldly" evangelicalism, for large groups now recognize this kind of Christian ethos and find it attractive. One young pastor stated on the conference floor that we should go from this baptism question to open debate on our Confession of Faith. He, and many others, would like to minimize or do away with any doctrinal emphases (like nonresistance) which call attention to our "peculiarities."

For these, the demand for rebaptism is probably not a problem. If their transfers were not immersed they mostly were baptized as infants. Few would have been sprinkled as adults on confession of faith, and even if they had been there might be few barriers to a rebaptism. Baptists (and, in the USA, Southern Baptists) set much of the ethos for this kind of evangelicalism, and some of them are still able to believe that immersion is the essence of baptism. Some Baptists even freely re-immense other Baptist transfers. Therefore Group (6) is likely to vote with Group (1) on the rebaptism of the non-immersed. Yet, ironically, they intend to "bury" almost everything else that Group (1) wishes to defend by this practice.

#### *Other Evidence from the Reedley Conference*

What I have argued so far is that the confused character of this resolution and the emotion behind its debate can only be explained by currents below the surface. I have also offered the hypothesis that a major part of the problem is our sense of MB identity over-against other groups, especially other Mennonite groups. And I projected six different ways in which that identity question divides us. I am not at all confident that I have identified the most important groups or that I have accurately described them. That can be tested by whether readers find themselves, or others, in these descriptions. I also realize that other sub-surface currents need to be charted.

There is, however, another way to test my hypothesis. If MBs have a fundamental identity problem, then surely it will surface in other ways. I believe that it does so, and I will limit myself to evidence of that in the other

statements presented by BORAC.

(1) *Most obviously, the statement on inter-Mennonite relations testifies to the very great hopes and fears which divide MBs vis a vis other Mennonites.* The statement admits that aspects of cooperation “tend to be controversial for Mennonite Brethren.” We “postpone facing these issues”; “some secretly hoped that the matter will go away”; BORAC “recognizes the sensitivity of this issue”; yet some “have desired intensified relations or even merger.” After a lengthy quotation of a statement on inter-Mennonite cooperation issued by the Bethlehem '83 joint OM and GC conference, BORAC asks MBs to be aware of this subject “and give themselves to prayerful support and counsel to find a God-honoring solution. Inter-Mennonite relations have to do with honesty and our reality in Christ with fellow-believers. No member of this body can evade that issue.”

It is somewhat unclear who or what is to be supported and counseled. But it is at least clear that BORAC is asking for help. They are certainly right that these relations have to do with honesty. We have so often entered into joint projects and commitments and have then withdrawn that our integrity is at stake. I submit that we cannot be trusted because of our own identity crisis. One part of us “wills,” and another part “nulls.” We do not agree on what constitutes our “Egypt.” We do not agree whether other Mennonites (or *which* other Mennonites) are our natural allies. We do not even agree which of our own MB distinctives to affirm or even whether our heritage is important enough to bother with, either positively or negatively. The issue cannot be evaded, says BORAC. But they are so aware that it is complex and divisive — and so unwilling to lead — that their “statement of counsel” gives no counsel beyond asking for counsel.

(2) *On the other hand, many of us are increasingly interested in our past.* The “Resolution on Historical Commission proposal” passed with no significant opposition. Of course, it did not involve much money; it mostly reorganized what already exists, and its emphasis on archival depositories strikes many as much too fusty to matter in the real world. It was a safe vote.

(3) *Even the “Statement on biblical authority” seems to me to reflect the underlying currents being considered.* It consists of a statement on biblical inerrancy put together by a group of scholars at Chicago several years ago preceded by a recommendation that it “be recognized as an acceptable summary of our position on the authority and inerrancy of the Scripture.”<sup>2</sup>

The BORAC introduction stated that “questions have been raised about how the (Buhler) statement relates to the Chicago Statement...” They did not say what questions have been raised, nor do I see how the Chicago Statement could help answer them. In fact, the two statements answer quite different questions. The Buhler Statement discusses five principles regarding the *interpretation* of Scripture. The one from Chicago is a statement on the nature of biblical authority and, specifically, seeks to define and defend *inerrancy* and *infallibility* (which the Buhler statement simply affirms in two sentences).

For a fleeting moment I wondered whether the attempt to impose the

Chicago statement was a “liberal” move to loosen up our strong stance on the scripture, since the Chicago statement was deliberately crafted to allow scholars to assert their sincere regard for scriptures in language sufficiently ambiguous to cover their own widely divergent interpretations on its nature and authority — or even their various definitions of “inerrant” and “infallible.”

But I cannot think that BORAC wished to create deliberate confusion, though that is the effect. It is much more likely that they were placating those among us who prefer to identify with evangelicals on all points, even at the cost of ignoring simple logic and the distinctively conservative way in which Mennonites have sought to honor and to be faithful to God’s word to us through the Bible. Perhaps the summary way the statement was handled on the Conference floor, and the fairly outright repudiation of it by one BORAC member lends credence to the rumor that the entire Board had not approved, had perhaps not even discussed, this statement of counsel.

In any case, someone (or ones) clearly must think that a statement by an ad hoc group of self-labeled evangelicals must automatically constitute a “standard” by which our own formulations must be judged. For them, even our own official statements, even when BORAC-formulated only six years earlier, represent the “Egypt” which is almost automatically suspect.

(4) *The statement labeled “Church membership profile” explicitly noted the evidence of greater diversity in our churches and its “implications for denominational identity.”* It noted that we continue to agree on doctrine, but that there are “clear discrepancies between belief and practice” and “considerable variability in lifestyle.”

Though there was no discussion of the statement, the survey data does represent a “hot potato,” for data showing that members have moved toward or away from certain teachings and practices may be decried or hailed depending upon the interpreter’s definition of what constitutes “Egypt.”

(5/6) *The other two statements of counsel presented by BORAC are related to the currents around us, but are not so directly “Mennonite” issues.* The statement on the “Ministry of women in our churches” speaks to something controversial among most “Egypt” or allies we may have.

The statement asking that criticism be coupled with affirmation should be well taken. But unless leadership deals with the underlying currents and with adequately defining our real “Egypt,” then there will be no way to deal effectively with surface issues. And inevitably there will be nothing left to affirm.

## YET ANOTHER SUBMERSION

All this talk of surface agitation and its sub-surface reasons ends by refracting back upon the speaker. This I had not expected. What deeper currents in me contributed to my indignation — and continues to do so? And if my feelings aren’t wholly righteous, is *my own* self-identity a problem?

It is true that I have often disagreed with doctrinal and moral resolutions which have been passed on the Conference floor. Worse yet, I have been

dismayed by how ineptly they have sometimes been written and by how uninformed the debate has often been.

The first conference I attended as a delegate was in 1961 (I think it was a district conference). Ironically, the major debate was whether to allow sprinkled laity to become members without rebaptism, and much was being made of the Early Church example. During a break, I approached a leading Church teacher and theologian and urged that these references were inaccurate. "I know," he sheepishly said, "Why don't you tell them. You are young. You have less to lose." I went home and wrote an article on the topic, but it was never published.

I was seriously disillusioned at the 1972 General Conference (again in Reedley) when BORAC admitted that their resolution on abortion was inadequate. They admitted that they had not even been aware of fundamental objections which had been voiced by delegates. "But we need *something*," pled the moderator. "Let's all vote for this and three years from now we will come back with a better statement." It actually passed — overwhelmingly!

Three years later at Winnipeg, BORAC presented an excellent paper on abortion. But it was not offered for a vote, nor did it result in a resolution. The Reedley statement remains our official position! I really do not know which of the many resolutions passed in the last one hundred years are even *intended* to remain binding. I know no principle, beyond personal agreement or blind obedience (which are not principles) which would automatically grant authority to any of them. It has been a long time since there has been an authentic process leading to a genuine consensus. Principles are not made true or binding by a majority — or even a two-thirds — vote. So far as I am concerned, resolutions have become worse than useless.<sup>3</sup>

I also know that I am distressed by many of the traditionalists among us who cling blindly to our old ethnic ways and our old symbols. I agree with them that much that is good and true seems to be dying with them. Apparently, for example, they once had a way to achieve consensus, even though their conclusions often alienated the more progressive. As I discussed in *New Wineskins for Old Wine*,<sup>4</sup> it is all too possible to lose the reality while clinging to the symbol which once expressed it (as they are now doing with immersion, I think).

I am even bothered by academics like myself. Our method is to call a study conference and read papers to each other about pressing issues. From these it was hoped that a scholarly consensus would emerge which could be ratified at a conference session. This also has not worked. In the first place, the natural setting for this mode is the University; and, as there, the built-in propensity is to generate variant viewpoints in geometric progression. Perhaps our scholars could have come to agreement if they hadn't had so many duties that they never would stay together long enough to work through the issues. In the second place, not even adequately footnoted essays produce conviction. The papers were published; but, except for the few who read them, and the still fewer who did not quickly forget them, they might as well have remained unwritten. In the third place, they remained on the surface of

things. They also betrayed little awareness of the way the currents below the surface shaped what was being discussed "rationally." Nor were the various "Egypt" and "Canaan" that shape rationality given their due.

I am also angry at those who are anxious to sell our birthright for whatever popular potage is offered by the religious marketplace. Twenty-four years ago I made a decision that I would try to remain with the Mennonite Brethren. I do not regret it, because that is what I am. But I increasingly wonder whether I have chosen a lost cause.

There are so many currents. And there is so little that has been done to understand and channel them. And so it is understandable that our leaders have been reduced to asking the rest of us for counsel and have hoped that "polity" — a decent respect for our common prejudices as revealed by majority vote — would substitute for the search for wisdom.

But isn't it possible to accept all this with some serenity, in faith that God is working even in all this for good? Or could I at least accept the possibility that I am slightly paranoid, misreading currents that might actually bring a stronger Church?

Perhaps so, if my own Christian identity were secure. What concerns me now is the likelihood that my dismay is really anger at myself. I have been given every opportunity to contribute to our Church. I have been free to think and to teach and to write. That first article was the only one that has been rejected. I think I have said many true things. I have often been blessed, and I think that I have been permitted to touch at least a few others for good. I have also made mistakes.

Mennonite Brethren have also stood for and lived out many true things. We have been blessed, and we have been permitted to touch others for good. We have also made mistakes.

But truths and blessings will not save us. When something at the center gives way, then all the good things are swept this way and that (or even remain for awhile) in response to currents which we neither understand nor control. And the currents sweep other good things past us and we eagerly grasp them until they again are swept away. But none of them are truly ours.

All this makes me angry. I am indignant that neither our official leadership nor the unofficial leadership which any of us may exercise has sought to understand and guide what is happening. I am equally distressed that the rest of us may prefer it that way. I think a strong argument can be made that we actually prevent the emergence of leaders.

The anger is partly a good sign. Apathy would mean that one no longer cared, that the search for the Kingdom among us had been abandoned. But does anger also mean that love is not yet pure, and that one has not yet received the righteousness which works to set things right?

There is the promise that if we seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all the good things will be added to us. But I am sure that we have not sought it well.

Then what, besides inertia, still holds us together? Perhaps our only hope is the ten or twenty righteous, here or there, whom God alone knows.

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Let us pray that they hold fast.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 See pp. 10B-11B in the "Reports and Recommendations for the 56th session of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches" convening in Reedley, California, October 12-16, 1984, as published in *The Christian Leader*, 21 August 1984.
- 2 As outlined in a statement accepted in 1978 at Buhler, Kansas. See *The Christian Leader*, 29 August 1978, pp. 6-7.
- 3 See my article, "Whatever Happened to Consensus?" *Direction* 9/2 (1980): 3-17.
- 4 As I discussed in *New Wineskins for Old Wine: A Study of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1965).