

**A Church Divided:  
Fundamentalism and Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, Nebraska, 1934-1950**

by

Scott Steven Janzen

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Mark Jantzen, Advisor

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## Preface

Mennonites, as numerous historians and scholars have already shown, participated in and borrowed from the fundamentalist movement in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet few studies have approached the topic at an exclusively congregational level—especially one as multifarious as Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, Nebraska. In light of the presence of fundamentalism in the broader Mennonite church, this study seeks to understand how Bethesda weathered the religious and cultural storm of the early twentieth century.

Few could dispute that Bethesda has always had (as it does presently) a membership whose attitudes, opinions, and beliefs on things both secular and sacred are quite diverse. As Bethel College Director of Church Relations Dale Schrag has often said, “No other Mennonite church, besides perhaps the church in Berne, Indiana, contains a broader spectrum of religious thought; from liberal to conservative, to you name it, Bethesda’s got it.” In the past this multiplicity of conviction has at times led to harsh disagreements between members and, on occasion, led a number of groups to break from the church and begin new congregations. Yet those who remained at Bethesda after such a break never seemed to constitute a homogenous group despite the departure of dissenters. Even to this day its members continue to represent the spectrum of political and theological positions and hold a wide range of opinions on issues from atonement to patriotism, Christology to nonviolence, and a host of other issues.

One could even say that the fundamentalist-modernist debate continues to simmer among Bethesda’s members. There remains real and perceivable rifts that sadly continue to divide the people of Bethesda. Those who disagree are friends and family, neighbors and coworkers, and fellow Christians, passionate about their faith and genuinely seeking to build up the Body of Christ—*the Church*—only they do it with very different ideas and through different means.

An optimist might argue that Bethesda simply exemplifies the old General Conference motto: In the essentials unity, in the non-essentials liberty, and in all things love. Perhaps their beliefs about the essentials are complementary and it is only on the “non-essentials” that they clash; or maybe their differences are more fundamental and irreconcilable. But what is truly disheartening, as a member of Bethesda and as a Christian, is the lack of love “in all things.” Members on both ends of the rift are guilty of being condescending of the other and talking badly about them. This is a tragedy and it makes a mockery of Christ and the Mennonite church’s dedication to following Him ever so nearly. It is disappointing, not to mention dangerous, that a church cannot engage in critical self-observation and assessment, that it cannot openly talk about its differences, and that individuals and groups privately fan the flames of their distaste for others.

Researching fundamentalism in Bethesda during the first half of the twentieth century was more difficult than expected, primarily because of the lack of written documents on the issue. Bethesda leadership and committees rarely, if ever, publicly discussed modernist or fundamentalist influences that may or may not have been present in their congregation. Nor are there copies of sermons that were given during that time to give us an idea of what the issues were. It is certain, however, that the issues of modernism and fundamentalism were there. There were perhaps modernists and fundamentalists in the congregation, but dialogue between the two or talk about related topics was avoided in public and in the church. Rather, they were talked about in private, in homes, and maybe on a rare occasion in the coffee shop among friends.<sup>1</sup> Thus, conclusions are hard to formulate and any sweeping judgment about the extent to which Bethesda was or was not influenced by fundamentalism can only be an oversimplification. That

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Epp of Henderson, Nebr., interview by author, 25 November 2005; Elmer and Bertha Friesen of Henderson, interview by author 23 October 2005; and Stan Voth of North Newton, Kans., interview by author, 5 December 2005.

is not to say that no conclusions can be drawn, but that the nature of the topic and the scarcity of relevant resources make neat and lucid conclusions impractical —things remain much too complicated for that.

Furthermore, the reliance on the memories of but a handful of church members is a risk, as the reliance on memories always is. We remember things as we perceived them and interpret events through our particular context, both the contemporary context and the context in which they are remembered. As those events steadily march farther and farther into the past, each passing minute makes our memory even less accurate and trustworthy. This is not to say that those who were interviewed are not trustworthy, only that reliance on interviews (especially about events that sometimes predate the interviewee) should be taken with a grain of salt.

History is not done in a vacuum. It is incredibly difficult to completely clear one's mind of the preconceptions and misconceptions one has about something—especially something one is genuinely passionate about. Growing up in Bethesda, I have naturally developed my own opinions about the issue at hand. However, I made every effort to leave those preconceptions and misconceptions at the door and simply write about what the records and memories of Bethesda reveal happened during the period in focus.

This study is in no way an attempt to disparage fundamentalism, nor is it an attempt to put down any one way of thought or belief that might be held by a member or members of Bethesda. This is a study of a church of which I am a member, a church that I love and deeply care for, and is not meant to oppose or unduly criticize it or any of its members. On the contrary, I hope that if this study does anything at all, that it helps the membership better see and understand the issues of theological diversity and Mennonite identity that exist in Bethesda. Maybe it will serve as an icebreaker or catalyst for discussion among its factions—that would be

wonderful. Or perhaps it will simply help us understand each other a little better, and that, too, is a good thing.

## Introduction

American-style fundamentalism made its first inroads at Bethesda Mennonite Church, a large, spiritually diverse, rural church, with a large-scale tent revival in 1934. While fundamentalism was not necessarily present in the revival, it helped prepare the way for its ideas to arrive later. The revival appealed to a more conservative, minority constituent within the congregation who would go on to serve as the base for later developments toward fundamentalism. The identifiably fundamentalist influences found their way into the congregation through numerous sources over the next 16 years in the form of a Moody-educated EMB minister in a neighboring church, radio programming, Cyrus I. Scofield's *Reference Bible*, and finally, and most significantly, through Grace Bible Institute (GBI). Fundamentalism in Bethesda was not militant anti-modernism, as historian George M. Marsden argues, though it was perhaps on some level anti-modernist, nor was it a form of denominational conservatism, as some Mennonite historians contend.<sup>2</sup> It was more concerned with premillennial dispensationalism and the support of GBI as a counter-institution to the liberal General Conference colleges. Fundamentalism always constituted a minority in Bethesda, was rarely spoken of from the pulpit or addressed publicly, and it was restrained by a non-creedal, progressive, General Conference-supporting majority and church leadership.

## Fundamentalism

At the turn of the twentieth century “evangelical” American Protestants were caught up in a heated debate between “modernists” and “fundamentalists.” In one corner were the

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<sup>2</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture: the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelism 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4; James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930*, The Mennonite Experience in America Series, vol. 3 (Scottsdale, Pa. and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1989), 259-60.

“modernists,” who believed that the progress of Christianity and the progress of culture were closely bound together, that religious ideas could be adapted to modern culture, and that the advancement of human society was also a movement towards the kingdom of God. During World War I, some modernists believed that the war was a battle to protect democracy against autocracy and to rid the world of the scourge of war once and for all; however, not all modernists felt this way.<sup>3</sup> Fundamentalists perceived modernists as a threat to Christianity because of their readiness to question key beliefs that fundamentalists saw as essential.

In the other corner were the fundamentalists, a militant evangelical Christian movement that sought to protect certain “fundamentals” of the faith that they perceived to be under attack by modernists—the inerrancy of scripture, a literal interpretation of Genesis’ creation account, the virgin birth, the resurrection, other miracles, Christ’s substitutionary atonement, the meaning of salvation, and biblical understandings of eschatology.<sup>4</sup> Many fundamentalists were passionate millenarians (most often in the form of dispensational premillennialism), deeply rooted in Pietism, revivalism, and Holiness teaching, and were in dynamic and direct opposition to modernists and what fundamentalists considered a perversion, or worse, apostasy, of the Christian faith. Put quite simply by Moody Bible Institute President James M. Gray, “Modernism is a revolt against the God of Christianity.”<sup>5</sup>

Fundamentalists and modernists came to a climactic confrontation in 1925 with the so-called Scopes “Monkey” trial over evolution; William Jennings Bryan and the fundamentalists suffered an embarrassing defeat at the hand of Clarence Darrow, and the “outpouring of derision” that followed would stain the movement as laughably rural, uneducated, and

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<sup>3</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 146.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, Pa. and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1996), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 3-4.

backwards. But fundamentalism did not disappear. It only took stronger root in other, “less conspicuous areas” as it began a new phase of grassroots work.<sup>6</sup>

Although fundamentalism was and continues to be found predominantly in conservative evangelical Christian circles, “some older sects, such as the Quakers and the Mennonites, which had always maintained their own distinctive characteristics, were now affected by some fundamentalist influences, and new groups, like the Evangelical Mennonites...were formed.”<sup>7</sup> Mennonites, therefore, were not outside of fundamentalism’s influence in America and they responded in unique ways.

One of the most problematic issues for scholars of fundamentalism and modernism is definition. What, exactly, constitutes a fundamentalist, and where is the line of demarcation between fundamentalism and, say, conservative evangelicalism? These are difficult questions to answer, but they are important. One has to be careful not to bandy about labels—especially a label as charged and convoluted as “fundamentalist.” While labels are an important and often helpful ways of classifying and ordering people and events, this study will attempt to refrain from any unnecessary usage of the term “fundamentalist” or “modernist” in order to better understand and respect those people and institutions involved.

There have been numerous attempts to define fundamentalism, but the work of two historians stand out: Professor of English Ernest R. Sandeen and Professor of Christian History George M. Marsden. Sandeen described fundamentalism as an “alliance between two newly-formulated nineteenth-century theologies, dispensationalism and the Princeton Theology,” which uneasily cooperated to oppose the spread of modernism.<sup>8</sup> Dispensationalism refers primarily to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 193-4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Origins of Fundamentalism: Towards a Historical Interpretation*, ed Richard C. Wolf, Facet Books Historical Series – 10 (American Church) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 3.

the division of history into seven discrete periods of time, or dispensations, which describes the stages of God’s grand scheme for humanity; dispensationalists also emphasize a very literal interpretation of scripture and the practice of prophesying about the “End Times” and Jesus’ Second Coming. Princeton Theology taught that the Bible was verbally inspired and inerrant in every reference, statistic, and quotation. So Sandeen argued that it should not seem strange that some dispensationalists and adherents of the Princeton Theology would cooperate in the defense of their similar views.

Some scholars have been critical of Sandeen’s definition. Among them is Marsden, the most notable and well-received scholar of fundamentalism to date. He argues that Sandeen’s approach “fails to deal adequately with the larger phenomenon of the militantly anti-modernist evangelicalism of the 1920s, known at the time as ‘fundamentalism.’”<sup>9</sup> Marsden describes fundamentalism as primarily a religious movement among certain Christian evangelical groups in America who professed complete confidence in the Bible, were preoccupied with the message of God’s salvation of sinners through the death of Jesus Christ, and who were militantly opposed to modernism, their most distinguishing characteristic. Fundamentalism was a “loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought.”<sup>10</sup> They had a mission to “purge the churches of modernism and the schools of Darwinism,” and they aggressively pursued that end.<sup>11</sup>

Mennonite historian Paul Toews provided a good example of the complexity and amalgamated nature of fundamentalism based on Marsden’s description: Fundamentalism was the

integration of many strands of the American religious past—nineteenth-century revivalism, pietism, evangelicalism, a congealing Presbyterian theology nourished by Princeton Seminary, millenarianism, Common Sense or Baconian philosophy

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<sup>9</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

and science, denominational conservatism, and more...[It] emerged as various people who commonly thought of themselves as evangelical responded to a profound religious and intellectual crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More and more the enemy was Modernism, both theological and cultural.<sup>12</sup>

Yet some insist that even Marsden's definition is incomplete and misses the mark.

Mennonite historian William Vance Trollinger, Jr. believes that Marsden's definition of fundamentalism as "militant anti-modernism" is too vague and begs for precision. Instead, much like Sandeen, Trollinger proposed that premillennial dispensationalism became the primary component of fundamentalism upon its inception by John Nelson Darby, and that this is the best identifier of fundamentalism, especially in the Believers' Church tradition—to which Mennonites belong.<sup>13</sup> This puts a different perspective on the fundamentalist movement among Mennonites and is supported by the findings of this study that dispensational premillennialism was primary for some Mennonite who were drawn to fundamentalism

Fundamentalism was not just a religious movement—it had a social or cultural element as well. Fundamentalists accused modernist theologians of banning 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."<sup>14</sup> By refuting traditional interpretations of the Genesis creation account(s) and uplifting Darwinism, it seemed to Fundamentalists that Modernists took God out of the world and, thus, out of the contemporary culture. Fundamentalists were concerned that modernists were undermining the Biblical foundations of American civilization.<sup>15</sup>

They also felt that Modernists, many of whom embraced the Social Gospel, diminished God's

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<sup>12</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 65.

<sup>13</sup> William Vance Trollinger, Jr., "How John Nelson Darby Went Visiting: Dispensational Premillennialism in the Believers Church Tradition and the Historiography of Fundamentalism," in *Apocalypticism and Millennialism: Shaping a Believers Church Eschatology for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Loren L. Johns (Kitchner, Ont.: Pandora Press and co-published with Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2000), 266-7.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Toews, "Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges: A Response to Cultural Transitions?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57 (July 1983), 243.

<sup>15</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 3.

role in the positive social reforms that were taking place.<sup>16</sup> In the cultural crisis following World War I, Fundamentalists were alarmed at how American culture had changed and was moving away from God, epitomized in the theory of evolution and the subsequent trial over its place in education. So fundamentalism was a response to both theological and cultural modernism, though the two were intrinsically connected.

## **Fundamentalism among Mennonites**

The term “Mennonites” describes a diverse array of Mennonite groups. By the late nineteenth century Mennonites had split into four main groups: the Mennonite Church (MC) or “old” Mennonite, the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC), the Mennonite Brethren (MB), and the Amish. While all Mennonite groups are products of the Anabaptist reformation, they made their way to the twenty-first century through different “streams” of history and through very different experiences.<sup>17</sup> Differences of tradition, culture, ethnicity, social/political/religious assumptions, conservative or progressive tendencies, and organizational conferences distinguished these streams from each other.

Mennonites are a complicated set of groups, and each responded to the twentieth century, and also fundamentalism, differently. So when writing Mennonite history and making claims about how “Mennonites” responded, one has to be careful not to generalize the various groups as one unified whole. The focus of this research is trained upon a specific congregation in a specific conference with a specific history and set of traditions: General Conference-affiliated Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, Nebraska.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, American Mennonites as a whole were searching for their niche in society—they were on a quest for identity and mission while at the same time

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<sup>16</sup> Toews, *Mennonite in American Society*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

trying to preserve their own unique cultural and ethnic identities.<sup>18</sup> The “quickenings” that swept over American Protestantism during that period influenced Mennonites as well, and, as a result, they borrowed heavily from mainstream traditions.<sup>19</sup> Mennonites started Bible schools and Sunday schools, established colleges and other institutions, began printing their own publications, strengthened their churches and conferences through better organization, promoted missions and service, held revivals and other special meetings, began youth and women’s organizations, and made serious attempts at codifying their own beliefs into creeds. Mennonites began, albeit late, at least in the American context, to transform from a sect into a more organized church denomination as part of the “mosaic of American Protestant pluralism.”<sup>20</sup> Mennonites borrowed heavily from American Protestantism during this process, yet they were also strongly committed to preserving their own distinct Mennonite identity. It was in this context that fundamentalism began to appear among them.

In a March 1919 edition of the *Gospel Herald*, Mennonite Church leader Daniel Kauffman compiled a list of things “most to be feared” for the church. At the top of that list, above the threats of Prussianism, alcoholism, and idolatry, was “modern LIBERALISM.”<sup>21</sup> Kauffman echoed the language of American Fundamentalists who viewed liberalism and Modernism with contempt and loosely organized themselves in militant opposition to it.

Daniel Kauffman was not a lone Mennonite fundamentalist, if he is to be given that label at all. In fact, all Mennonite groups experienced some form of fundamentalism in the twentieth century. Nathan Yoder insists that fundamentalism dominated MCs in the early twentieth century and that “the clearest sign of their success was their purge of theologically more liberal

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<sup>18</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 258.

<sup>19</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Kauffman, “Christianity’s Greatest Foe,” *Gospel Herald* (Mar. 27, 1919), 921.

progressives” from their ranks; this is seen most clearly in the reorganization of Goshen College in 1923-24.<sup>22</sup> He argues that Mennonite fundamentalists (and he recognizes this as a legitimate term) adapted modern methods to resist social and theological modernism in the Mennonite Church and establish a permanency of what they considered Anabaptist-rooted doctrine and practice.<sup>23</sup> The MBs experienced controversy at Tabor College in the 1940s during the Peter E. Schellenberg era and in the opening of Pacific Bible Institute, and GCs were rocked by the “Daniel Explosion” at Bethel College and the establishment of Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska, as well as numerous other events.<sup>24</sup> This study will focus mainly on the issues related to Bethesda and the General Conference, but it is interesting to note that all three of the major branches of Mennonitism in America experiences some degree of trauma during the fundamentalist-modernist clash.

There are many ways church historians have understood why and how this phenomenon happened among Mennonites in general, but two main issues have come to dominate the discussion: first, most Mennonite historians agree that fundamentalism was not an outside force that “infiltrated” Mennonitism, but was voluntarily (or perhaps involuntarily) picked up and used by church leaders because it seemed to meet important perceived needs; secondly, there are two main paradigms used by Mennonite historians to describe why: 1) it was part of the denominationalizing process of Mennonites in America; 2) it was an expression of conservatism on the part of Mennonites in order to protect the Mennonite faith tradition; a third concept that Paul Toews says supplements the first two is that it was part of a cultural need for defining

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<sup>22</sup> Nathan Emerson Yoder, “Mennonite Fundamentalism: Shaping an Identity for an American Context,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, April 1999), abstract.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 64-83; James C. Juhnke, “The Daniel Explosion: Bethel’s First Bible Crisis,” *Mennonite Life* 44 (Sept. 1989), 20-25.

boundaries/location of the “Mennonite religio-cultural sect to a shifting American culture.”<sup>25</sup>

This leads many Mennonite historians to argue that most Mennonite fundamentalists were really denominational conservatives—Mennonites concerned with conserving the traditions of the faith that they felt were under threat from an encroaching American culture.<sup>26</sup>

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 of the former than the latter. It was that kind of movement because the theological modernism in the Mennonite world was only incipient and marginal.<sup>27</sup>

Most Mennonites generally believed in creation, the virgin birth, resurrection, and the “saving efficacy of Christ’s shed blood,” but before the twentieth century they took these orthodox positions for granted rather than developing them into systematic doctrines like fundamentalists did. However, by the early twentieth century, particularly among MCs, a more systematic doctrinal approach to scripture began to emerge, as demonstrated by Daniel Kauffman’s *Manual of Bible Doctrine*.<sup>28</sup> Paul Toews believes that if MCs were forced to choose between fundamentalism or modernism, and fundamentalist insisted that one choose, they would come down on the side of the fundamentalists because they shared many of the same orthodox beliefs (MCs added nonconformity and nonresistance).<sup>29</sup> Even though GCs shared all of those

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Toews, “Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges,” 246.

<sup>26</sup> There are some exceptions, like John Horsch, who participated in the broader Fundamentalist movement to such a degree that I find it hard not to call him a Mennonite with a clear involvement in the broader fundamentalist movement. Paul Toews seems to agree, see *Mennonites in American Society*, 66 and “Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges,” 243-4. See also John Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House), 1924; John Horsch, *Modern Religious Liberalism: The Destructiveness and Irrationality of Modernist Theology* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sword and Trumpet, Inc.), 1925, reprint 1968.

<sup>27</sup> Toews, “Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges,” 244.

<sup>28</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

orthodox beliefs, such as creation, the virgin birth, and so on, the conference had a very different outlook on the systematic exposition of doctrine—it was to be avoided.

## General Conference Mennonite Church

Mennonite Church historian Harold S. Bender argued that the GC experienced far more liberal influences and far more fundamentalist influences than any other Mennonite body.<sup>30</sup> Church historian Rodney J. Sawatsky believes that while Bender overstated the fundamentalist element in the conference, he was perhaps correct about the liberal influences and “undoubtedly right that the General Conference embraces the broadest spectrum of theological positions of any Mennonite denomination.”<sup>31</sup> Bender perceived the variety within the denomination as the cause of a serious crisis, and he “wondered if ‘a middle core of Mennonitism and conservatism’ could be found to heal the wounds and hold the group together.”<sup>32</sup>

Since its organization in 1860, the General Conference has been characterized by a spirit of cooperation and a congregational polity where congregations were independent of and not subject to the conference body. The founders of the conference believed in a high doctrine of individual responsibility, the essence of the Believers’ Church tradition, and so they aimed to “deepen Mennonite faith, but through freedom and autonomy rather than authority and control.”<sup>33</sup> “The ideal was the minimum of overall control and the maximum of fellowship in the

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<sup>30</sup> “Outside Influences on the Mennonite Church,” unedited version, H. S. Bender collection, Box #237, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.; quoted in Rodney J. Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity: the Dynamics of the General Conference Mennonite Church*, Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series (North Newton, Kans.: Bethel College, 1987), 57.

<sup>31</sup> Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 30.

work of the kingdom.” Thus there was an emphasis on working on missions together with other Mennonites and even denominations rather than on creeds or doctrines.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly enough, that freedom allowed the conference to be “open and inclusive, and created the space for considerable diversity in theological perspective” between congregations and even between individuals within each congregation—this is especially true of Bethesda. This would include conservative, or even fundamentalist, positions as well as liberal or modernist ones. Sawatsky believes that this particular combination of conservative and progressive elements might have confused Bender and seemingly continues to do the same to anyone who wants to sort the GC (or Bethesda) neatly into one of two camps.<sup>35</sup>

Bethesda’s affiliation with the GC means that the church was independent and not restricted to or held to any specific religious doctrine. This allowed for there to be a dramatic variety of theological perspectives within the congregation—modernistic to fundamentalist—and there was perhaps such a sweeping diversity in the church. Into the twentieth century, the GC was tossed about by what Paul Toews calls “theological whirlwinds” and Samuel F. Pannabecker, president of Mennonite Biblical Seminary, describes as a “sterile liberalism and a dogmatic orthodoxy.”<sup>36</sup> This dynamic is an important one to keep in mind as we explore how Bethesda responded to the fundamentalist-modernist debate.

Part of the cause of these whirlwinds is due GC’s failure to articulate a theological system appropriate to their history and position in society until much later.<sup>37</sup> Sawatsky elaborates and identifies part of the cause in a particular dynamic within the conference: there was a “more conservative or even ‘fundamentalist’” minority that felt alienated by a majority

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel Floyd Pannabecker, *Open Doors: a History of the General Conference Mennonite Church*, Mennonite Historical Series (Newton, Kans.: Faith & Life Press, 1975), 382-3.

<sup>35</sup> Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 78.

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

that often took “positions deemed liberal and therefore considered by some as heretical or even anti-Christian.”<sup>38</sup> Those who took such “liberal” positions were often considered to be institutions, periodicals, or leaders, which explains why so much controversy took place in Mennonite colleges and over Mennonite publications. But these two groups always remained in the GC despite attempts to create unity, and Sawatsky believes that this was possible because there were at least two different sets of assumptions operating within the conference.

The first was a minority group that supported a less-critical stance towards American political and military policy and a more Puritan or holiness stance with regard to personal morality; they especially sought a more “definitive confessional stance particularly regarding Biblical authority.”<sup>39</sup> This position lent itself to fundamentalism quite comfortably, and many people from this group took considerable steps in that direction

The second was a majority constituency and the group that characterized the GC for most of its history, which was essentially non-creedal and in that sense liberal. The General Conference deliberately de-emphasized sharing a common creed in an attempt to unify, attract, and include as many Mennonites as possible; in fact, they believed that adopting a creed could only do the opposite. H. P. Krehbiel, early General Conference historian and minister, was a strong advocate that the GC be unified by, in the words of Sawatsky, a “common agenda of life and work” rather than a “detailed consensus of faith and order”—a clear doctrinal stance. He, as well as most others, took it for granted that all members shared a common general theological understanding anyway, so there was no need for a doctrinal statement.<sup>40</sup>

One should not, however, come to the conclusion that GCs were theological liberals. Professor Kenneth Cauthen identifies two kinds of “liberals.” The first are “evangelical

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<sup>38</sup> Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 61; Pannabecker, *Open Doors*, 387.

liberals,” who are liberal in spirit by being accepting of change and of adapting religion to the modern culture, but who are traditional in theology. The second are “modernistic liberals” who are also accepting of change and of adapting religion to fit modern culture, but who are more skeptical of “old truths” that no longer seem to be credible.<sup>41</sup> Sawatsky seems to want to identify GC Mennonites with the “evangelical liberals” model since the evangelical components of GC theology tended to limit or outweigh the liberal components in the 1920s and 1930s.

Various individuals and congregations were drawn to a more liberal and others to a more fundamentalist position, but on balance the emphasis remained on a non-dogmatic, pietist-oriented evangelism in which faith in Jesus Christ as Savior remained central.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1930s, GC leader E. G. Kaufman said that “the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Ephesians 2:8), this is the only creed of the General Conference Mennonites.”<sup>43</sup> In 1955 a Study Conference on the Believer’s Church held by GCs affirmed a set of criteria for membership in the General Conference that virtually matched Richard Quebedeux’s definition of “evangelicals:” those who embrace the authority of scripture, the necessity of personal conversion, and the missionary mandate to seek the conversion of all to Christ.<sup>44</sup> Paul Toews goes so far as to declare that there was “almost no real theological modernism” among Mennonites, including GCs.<sup>45</sup> At the 1946 Northern District Conference, a subdivision within the GC, Willard Claassen, in his conference address, quoted C. Henry Smith’s book, *The Story of the Mennonites*: “It will be observed that the questions in dispute do not

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<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Cauthen as quoted in Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 67.

<sup>42</sup> Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 69.

<sup>43</sup> E. G. Kaufman as quoted in Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 69.

<sup>44</sup> The Believer’s Church conference included in addition: fellowship of the church and separation from the world, see Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 66.

concern themselves with the fundamental church doctrines. Mennonite quarrels never do.”<sup>46</sup> It seemed even the case in the 1940s that GCs shared basically the same fundamentals of church doctrine, expressed even in the conference motto: In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things love. From this brief survey there is not much room for charges of modernism among GC Mennonites.

Rather than using terms such as “liberal” or “conservative,” historian James Juhnke has identified the General Conference as the “progressive wing of American Mennonites, the wing that pointed toward missions, education, and ecumenism.”<sup>47</sup> As a progressive group, most believed that Mennonite identity and faith need not be “encapsulated in cultural forms,” and that Mennonite faith and peoplehood could exist closer to society and not just on the margins. GCs agreed that Mennonite identity was not founded so strongly in nonconformity as their MC brothers and sisters believed. GCs were therefore forced to look elsewhere for unifying elements. “Those that emerged were institutional, ideological, and ecumenical. Church institutions, new theological formulations, and inter-Mennonite alliances forged a new sense of community to replace the one disappearing with the demise of village unity.”<sup>48</sup>

Early on GCs started Sunday schools, founded colleges and seminaries, began mission programs, and started publications. Through these things GC Mennonites increasingly come into contact with the broader American culture in the half century before World War I. They made contacts with the outside world and other denominations and began to make both secular and religious adjustments to the surrounding culture. New ideas about church structure, ways of living, and even theologies quickly found an avenue into these typically closed Mennonite

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<sup>46</sup> C. Henry Smith as quoted in Diena Schmidt, ed., *The Northern District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church 1891-1991: a History of the Conference Committees and Churches of the Northern District Conference* (Freeman, S.D.: Pine Hill Press, Inc., 1991), 43.

<sup>47</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 95.

<sup>48</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 33-4.

communities through missions, Sunday schools, revivals, and other activities they borrowed from the American religious awakening.<sup>49</sup>

“*Kirchliche*”<sup>50</sup> Dutch-Russian Mennonite congregations, like Bethesda, joined the General Conference out of their common progressive outlook on missions, education, and ecumenism.<sup>51</sup> This was the natural choice for them because of their experience in Russia where they enjoyed tremendous control over their communities—political, educational, and religious freedom—and the GC allowed for similar autonomy. But they were unaware of the consequences that progressive institutions would have on them and, especially, their young people. As GC youth encountered the upbeat revivalism of American Protestantism and went out into the world, either through public schools, colleges, or missions, they developed new ideas and worldviews. Many of them left Mennonitism for more Americanized denominations. Part of the GC’s reason for drawing so much from American Protestantism was to keep the interest of their youth. Yet somewhere between the draw from American Protestantism on the one side and the experiences and education of the conference’s youth on the other, some detected traces of modernism and cried foul. Some historians have shown that GCs of the more conservative minority group looked for ways to preserve the traditions and beliefs that they felt were in jeopardy and found it in fundamentalism.<sup>52</sup>

In 1902, the conference took an official position on the subject of higher criticism of the Bible, what most fundamentalists considered a “modernist” and unacceptable technique: the “conference earnestly warns against the injurious teachings of the so-called higher critics and

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<sup>49</sup> Pannabecker, *Open Doors*, 388-9.

<sup>50</sup> Meaning “churchly” or “establishment,” *Kirchliche* Mennonites were the main body of Mennonites that remained after a great schism in the early 1870s in Russia produced the more Pietist-influenced Mennonite Brethren, see Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 260; Toews, “Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges,” 245.

against all negative tendencies which question the authenticity of the Bible and endanger the faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.”<sup>53</sup> By that time, Cornelius H. Wedel, president and Bible and Religion professor at Bethel College, had introduced modern methods of Biblical studies. It could be that the conference’s position was taken in response to this and the growing suspicion of modernism in the wider American Protestant context. But Wedel continued to teach unhindered at Bethel and with the support of the conference.<sup>54</sup>

### **Bethel College and the “Daniel Explosion”**

Paul Toews lists a number of identifiable moments of “fundamentalism’s crusade” in the General Conference: the crisis at Bethel college from 1916-20 (climaxing in the “Daniel Explosion”) and the crisis there from 1930-32; the aggressive charge of modernism at Bluffton College; the General Conference sessions in 1929; the closing of Witmarsum Seminary in 1931; and the 1943 founding of Grace Bible Institute.<sup>55</sup> Toews sees each one of these events as clear signposts of fundamentalism’s activity within the General Conference. It is interesting to note that all but one of these took place in an institution of higher learning.

The two crisis points from the above list that perhaps had the most impact on Bethesda are those relating to Bethel College and Grace Bible Institute. The 1916 “Daniel Explosion,” a phrase coined by Bethel alumnus and retired Professor of History James Juhnke, initiated a long period of decline at Bethel, and perhaps lead to its near demise. The “explosion” detonated when Jacob F. Balzer, a graduate of Chicago Divinity School, delivered a chapel lecture on the Book of Daniel. He had learned some modern ideas in Chicago and presented them to the gathered

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<sup>53</sup> Henry P. Krehbiel, *History of the General Conference of the Mennonites of North America*, vol. 2 (Newton, Kans.: the author, 1938), 75.

<sup>54</sup> Edmund G. Kaufman, *General Conference Mennonite Pioneers* (North Newton, Kans.: Bethel College, 1973), 159-61.

<sup>55</sup> Towes, “Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges,” 241.

students and faculty. He spoke about how most scholars were now indicating, through modern literary and historical analysis, that the Book of Daniel was probably not written during the Babylonian captivity (ca. 500 B.C.E.), but much later (ca. 168 B.C.E.). The very next day, Gustav Enss, described as “Bethel’s conservative German language teacher,” led chapel and proceeded to publicly attack Balzer and his dangerous ideas. Enss, perhaps lamenting and warning at the same time, declared that “Modernism” and “higher learning,” terms quite often used by fundamentalists to label their opponents, had invaded Bethel College. Enss implied that Balzer should resign his position in Bethel’s Bible and Religion Department. In the end, Enss, Balzer, and the other “insurgents” left the college shortly after the “Daniel Explosion,” and Bethel President J. W. Kliewer resigned three years later, perhaps as a casualty of the events as well.<sup>56</sup>

As Juhnke recounts, “the Enss-Balzer confrontation caused a firestorm on both the Bethel campus and in the relations between the college and its church constituency. Students returned to their home congregations [perhaps even Bethesda] and informed parents and pastors about the controversy.”<sup>57</sup> Balzer and other Bethel faculty were perceived as modernist insurgents and attacked by anti-modernists for being religiously unorthodox. “The accusers borrowed doctrinal lists from American Fundamentalism to accuse them of disbelieving the seven-day creation, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, and the literal inerrancy of the scriptures.” The accused returned with only brief statements of their positions, none of them clarifying their doctrinal position in such a way as to decisively refute the accusations against them.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Juhnke, “The Daniel Explosion,” 20.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 23.

But perhaps more dangerous was the insurgents' quickness to support military action in World War I.<sup>59</sup> Characteristic of many "liberals" and modernists during this time, they felt restricted by their forefathers' nonresistant tradition and were enthusiastically supportive of the nation's growing militarism and nationalism that they failed to see that they had bought into it at the cost of their adherence to the Anabaptist emphasis on nonresistance.<sup>60</sup>

As Bethesda's official church school, one can imagine that the eruption at Bethel in 1916 was felt in the congregation some 200 miles away. Historically, Bethesda leadership always supported Bethel College, even in 1916. Offerings were often collected for the school and many youth attended it year after year. But there was also a contingent who did not support the school because they found its Bible Department to be too liberal, especially under E. G. Kaufman, and they instead sent their children to schools like Moody Bible Institute and, later, GBI instead.<sup>61</sup> While no official church records or memories from Bethesda recall or even mention the "Daniel Explosion," one can be certain that reaction was mixed: perhaps some cringed and defended the school, and others no doubt felt that their suspicions of modernism at the school were confirmed. The church continued to heartily support the school, which points to the will of the majority of members and Bethesda leadership to support Bethel despite whatever news they received about the incident.

## **Bethesda History**

In 1874, thirty-five Mennonite families from Molotschna, South Russia (Ukraine) rolled their wagons through the untamed prairie of Nebraska. Their destination was the Henderson

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen.

Township about fifteen miles north of Sutton where an eighty-by-twenty-foot immigrant house<sup>62</sup> awaited them. They had left their homes and communities, some friends and family members, and their privileged (albeit deteriorating) status in South Russia mainly for religious reasons. Why make such a bold move to leave so much behind for sod homes on the Great Plains? There would have been a number of reasons, including Russification<sup>63</sup> and increasing government intervention in the affairs of the Mennonite colonies. But perhaps the issue of greatest importance was their objection to the Russian government's pressure on the group to join the military. Increasing pressure to enlist threatened their belief in nonviolence, a core value of Mennonites based upon their understanding of Jesus' life and teachings in the Bible.<sup>64</sup> Tentatively promised exemption from conscription by the United States government, they decided to immigrate to the Great Plains where they hoped to live peaceful lives exempt from military service and free to practice their faith.

Upon their arrival, the group settled *en masse* in the immigrant house provided to them by the B & M Railroad; there they lived and worshiped together in tight quarters. Two ministers, Heinrich Epp and Benjamin Ratzlaff (a Mennonite Brethren minister) served as leaders of the group, although Rev. Ratzlaff passed away shortly after arriving. Other Mennonite immigrants from Russia, including more MBs, soon joined the original group. Among them were Rev. Isaac Peters and Rev. Gerhard Epp, both of whom would play important roles in the religious direction

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<sup>62</sup> Many railroad companies that sold land to groups of immigrants supplied them with simple shelter until they could build houses for their families on their own land.

<sup>63</sup> After Russia lost the Crimean War in the 1850s, the government, in an attempt to create a stronger and more unified Russian population, implemented reforms to force non-Russians to assimilate into the culture. For the Mennonites, this meant that instruction in their schools was now to be done in Russian, not German, and that posed a serious threat to their distinct German identity—something most Mennonites in Russia could not part with, Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History: a Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites*, 3d ed. (Scottsdale, Pa. and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1993), 183-5.

<sup>64</sup> There were also economic reasons, but both were influential, see Stanley Voth, *Henderson Mennonites: From Holland to Henderson*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Henderson, Ne.: Service Press, Inc., 1981) chapter 3, and Robert O. Epp, *One Hundred Years of Bethesda Mennonite Church*, ([Henderson Nebr.]: Centennial Committee of the Bethesda Mennonite Church, [1975]), 2-3.

of the community. Most Mennonite Brethren families moved into the community from other villages in South Russia in 1876 and conducted their worship in homes until the construction of their first church in 1880.<sup>65</sup> For the original families from the Molotschna Colony, the overcrowded immigrant house was the only place for worship until a church building could be constructed. Until that time, families were busy building their own houses and plowing the tough sod. But it was this group that met in the immigrant house that at some point became known as the Bethesda Church.<sup>66</sup>

However, it did not take long for conflict to divide the community. All of the Mennonite families living there were from the Molotchna Colony in South Russia, but they were from different villages within the colony. Even though they held much in common with each other theologically, culturally, linguistically, and ethnically, other differences between them, particularly in relation to church discipline, proved divisive. As one Mennonite described them, Mennonites “have firm convictions about church affairs and do not readily change their views on anything, even if it sometimes seems to be of relatively small importance.”<sup>67</sup> Naturally, it could be expected that this ecclesial stubbornness might lead to new schisms—and it did. Yet although divisions occurred, the disunity within even the newly-formed congregations, as well as those they broke from, always seemed to persist on some level.

The first split in Bethesda occurred in 1877 when the member families, who were all worshipping in the immigrant house at the time, began to quarrel about matters like church discipline, mode of baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. The outcome was that Heinrich Nickel and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 77-8.

<sup>66</sup> The word “Mennonite” wouldn’t officially be added to the name of the church until 1972 when it was brought to the congregation’s attention by Stanley Voth. Apparently when the church was incorporated in 1902, including the word “Mennonite” was either overlooked or considered to be unnecessary since most churches in the area were Mennonite and it was assumed everyone would know Bethesda was as well; see *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Theodore Schmidt, “The Mennonites of Nebraska” (M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1933), 23.

Peter Wall took a small following and organized the so-called “Wall’s Church.” However, the congregation dissolved before three years passed; by that time many of the members had left to join the nearby Mennonite Brethren Church, while others returned to Bethesda.<sup>68</sup>

In 1880, members of Bethesda completed their first church building and they left the immigrant house. Yet just one year later, dissension had begun to brew; by 1882 there would be another serious breach in the congregation—one far more significant than the first.<sup>69</sup>

Rev. Isaac Peters, and part of his congregation from Pordenau, Russia, joined Bethesda upon their arrival early in 1875. He quickly became recognized as a church leader in the community, especially after the death of Rev. Benjamin Ratzlaff. Rev. Peters, described as a forceful man who was passionately believed that the Mennonite church should be the “true Anabaptist church,” was disheartened in what he saw in Bethesda.<sup>70</sup> One Evangelical Mennonite Brethren church historian in 1937 said that among them were the “truly born again as well as the nominal Christians,” probably meaning those who emphasized strict guidelines for living apart from the world and those who were more inclined to follow those rules more loosely and adopt some worldly habits (like smoking and chewing tobacco).<sup>71</sup> One church member described the nature of the wedge that split the congregation:

Some of the members insisted that too much drinking, smoking, and loose living was practiced among the members and that there was a lack of the proper spiritual life in the group. A stricter church discipline was demanded, and a renovation in the church of the lax and superficial Christian life of many of the members was insisted on. The schism could not be healed.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Voth, *Henderson Mennonites*, 69; Schmidt, “The Mennonites of Nebraska,” 30; Epp, *One Hundred Years*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Other sources date this event in 1880, see Calvin W. Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism: From Evangelical Mennonite Brethren to Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches* (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press, 1998), 42 and footnote on page 216, no. 44.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>71</sup> D. H. Epp, “A Historical Sketch of the Churches of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren [1889-1939], ed. by G. S. Rempel, et. al. (Rosthern, Sask.: D. H. Epp, [1939]), 88.

<sup>72</sup> Schmidt, “Mennonites of Nebraska,” 30.

Much to his dismay, Rev. Peters' insistence on a stricter church discipline fell on deaf (or perhaps more accurately, stubborn) ears. Some sources say he was met with severe opposition.<sup>73</sup> Thus he and most of his congregation from Pordenau, as well as Rev. Heinrich Epp and Rev. Cornelius Wall, organized a separate congregation called the Ebenezer Church (later renamed Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB) church after the conference it was affiliated with), though it was long known as the "Peters Church," and they took with them about fifteen to twenty families; this left about sixty families at Bethesda.<sup>74</sup> In 1883, Bethesda lost Rev. Johann Kliewer to the Ebenezer congregation, leaving Rev. Gerhard Epp as Bethesda's sole minister.<sup>75</sup> That loss was perhaps like pouring salt in the wound.

This break had a negative impact on the entire community. Not only did it divide friends and neighbors, but it also separated family members—even Rev. Heinrich Epp, who sided with Isaac Peters, told his son to remain with the Bethesda congregation.<sup>76</sup> Bethesda Church and Ebenezer Church have since kept their distance from each other, preventing the development of an amiable relationship even to this day. However, the two churches inevitably interacted since members of the same families sometimes attended different churches, or there were family friends who attended one or the other. So there was an informal tie on the individual or familial level between Bethesda and Ebenezer. Despite the official distance Bethesda and the Ebenezer church maintained, their close proximity and unavoidable interactions would play a significant role in shaping Bethesda's reaction to fundamentalism at the turn of the century. Ebenezer would become one of the two founding congregations of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren

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<sup>73</sup> Epp, "A Historical Sketch," 88.

<sup>74</sup> Schmidt, "Mennonites of Nebraska," 30.

<sup>75</sup> Epp, *One Hundred Years*, 6.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Conference, which would eventually abandon its Mennonite heritage and identity altogether.<sup>77</sup> This had a significant impact on the church's involvement in the fundamentalist movement, as well as Bethesda's.

American Protestantism experienced a quickening towards the turn of the century that saw the development of Sunday schools, mission organizations, publications, institutions, conferences and other forms of organization—Bethesda was caught up in it like most other Mennonite groups. Already in 1888, Bethesda emphasized mission work and collected regular offerings towards that effort.<sup>78</sup> In 1891, Bethesda Church joined the newly-formed Northern District Conference, demonstrating their desire to join other Mennonite churches in the region that could strengthen them with a Christian witness.<sup>79</sup> Two years later it aligned with the General Conference Mennonite Church.<sup>80</sup> The first Sunday school, organized in 1892, was dropped completely a year or two later because one of these Russian immigrants were uneasy with following the changes of American denominations and more concerned about keeping things as they had always been. They were not used to this kind of education and doubted that it was the work of the Lord at all. A similar attitude among some members was perhaps felt towards all progressive elements in general. But by 1894 or 1895 the progressive majority reinstated Sunday school, despite some opposition. Not only was there Sunday school, but they also organized a Young People's society (*Jugendverein*) in 1895, which was likewise dropped and then later reorganized as a Christian Endeavor Society.<sup>81</sup> Bethesda Church borrowed these elements from American Protestantism, even though they had left Russia in part to preserve their autonomy and unique characteristics.

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<sup>77</sup> The other was founded by Aaron Wall in Minnesota, see Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 44-9.

<sup>78</sup> Voth, *Henderson Mennonites*, 70.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Epp, *One Hundred Years*, 8; Pannabecker, *Open Doors*, 141.

<sup>81</sup> Epp, *One Hundred Years*, 8.

In 1948 the Ministerial Council followed six guidelines in their search for a new elder: he must 1) be a consecrated Christian devoted to the ministry; 2) have an adequate education; 3) be able to appeal to young and old members alike; 4) be balanced as far as the presentation of the Gospel is concerned; be in good standing with the General Conference (such as being in accord with the peace principle, mindful of the various boards of the conference, etc.); and 6) if possible, not be hindered by family ties.<sup>82</sup> A number of things are important to note here. The stipulation that he not be hindered by family ties is interesting, but it makes the point that the elder must be able to put aside family interests when doing church work. Selecting elders from out of the congregation was risky since family relations could have an adverse effect. If the elder's family, who were most likely in the congregation, had strong opinions about how things were done in the church, he must not give in to their pressure or be influenced by them. Instead, he should be more concerned about being in accordance with the GC, following its principles and supportive of its activities.

What is most interesting is the stipulation that the elder present the Gospel in a balanced manner. Notice the absence of any insistence of a clear and particular way of teaching. Bethesda leadership were expected to be able to be theologically balanced in order to reach as much of the membership as possible—a membership that was theologically and politically diverse.

## **Congregational Dynamics**

Bethesda Church has, from the start, been a church composed of people with dissimilar beliefs and opinions on things spiritual and temporal—it has historically not had a uniform congregation. Like the broader General Conference, Bethesda had a similar “liberal” (non-

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<sup>82</sup> Bethesda Record Book #3, minutes of the ministerial council, 5 January 1948, ed. Kathleen Friesen, 2000, trans. Emil Friesen, 1978, 141-2, Bethesda Mennonite Church archives, Henderson, Nebraska.

creedal) majority/conservative minority dynamic. The splits it endured are perhaps a testimony to this reality. Yet those splits never seemed to create a homogenous congregation and arguments and disputes over church doctrine and practices continued as exemplified by the decision to discontinue the practice of footwashing.

The Biblical practice of footwashing was a part of Bethesda's communion service from early on. Members would line up in the aisles and process towards the front of the church where a number of wash tubs were located. One would have his or her feet washed by the person in front of him or her (women washed the feet of women and men of men) and then one would in turn wash the feet of the person next in line. This was an intimate show of brotherhood and sisterhood in the church family, and it was intended to foster not only a sense of servanthood, as Christ had made himself a servant, but to also a sense of unity within the congregation. However, there was not unity in the church. Eventually, the situation deteriorated to the point where people became so selective in which line they joined, hoping to avoid washing the feet of someone they disagreed with, that there was no longer any point in performing the ritual; in fact, it was not fostering unity at all, but making the divisions within the congregation more visible. Finally, in 1938, two years after fundamentalism rolled into town under a big revival tent, which we will see later, the congregation overwhelmingly voted to discontinue the practice of footwashing.<sup>83</sup>

One might suspect a connection between the arrival of the revival meetings and the discontinuation of footwashing in Bethesda. The revivals were very divisive. Those who were enthusiastic for the revival fervor often looked down upon those who did not participate or were critical of that style in their community. We can be sure that both attitudes could be found in

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<sup>83</sup> Bethesda Record Book #3, minutes of annual meetings, 2 January 1938, 125; minutes of annual meetings, 11 December 1941, 130; Kathleen Friesen of Henderson, Nebr., interview by author, 22 October 2005.

Bethesda, and that everyone knew where everyone else stood. Such a dynamic might cause those from one side to detest the idea of washing the feet of the other—to perform an act of submission and humility for someone who is puffed up with pride or, on the other side, lacks true Christian zeal. This may be one example of how revivalism and fundamentalism, or American-style Protestantism in general, only caused the existing gap between the majority and minority constituents to widen.

Perhaps part of the cause of this disunity was geographical as well, since Bethesda was the only GC church for almost a hundred miles. *Kirchliche* Mennonites had no other option but to attend Bethesda, unless they were willing to make the switch, as some did, to the Ebenezer church and its very different style of worship and church discipline. Most *Kirchliche* wanted to stay in Bethesda regardless if they felt they were a minority there. Perhaps they stayed for cultural reasons, or maybe they wanted to change Bethesda to fit what they thought it should be like. In any case, the isolation of the church played a significant role in ensuring that Bethesda would maintain a diverse congregation throughout its history.

## Radio

In the 1930s and 40s, the radio became increasingly available for ordinary Americans all over the country, including Henderson. Calvin Redekop makes the statement that “the radio was probably as influential in the introduction of evangelism and fundamentalism into American homes...as any other factor.” Programs like Charles E. Fuller’s “Old Fashioned Revival Hour,” the Detweilers’ “Calvary Hour,” and Theodore F. Epp’s “Back to the Bible” beamed their “appeals and theologies” into some Mennonite homes.<sup>84</sup> “Back to the Bible,” broadcasted out of Lincoln, was the prominent program Bethesda members listened to. It catered to their interests

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<sup>84</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 154.

primarily through its selection of religious music and religious messages. It was initially a Mennonite program, but it eventually lost that connection and became more mainstream.<sup>85</sup>

Bethesda never officially supported the program, though for a time one could donate money to it through the church offering.<sup>86</sup> Today, some people look back and feel that “Back to the Bible” actually dispensed propaganda aimed at drawing people into the fundamentalist mindset.<sup>87</sup> If that statement truly reflects reality, then one might be confident in saying that part of the origin of fundamentalism in Bethesda came from the radio. Epp and others from “Back to the Bible” were certainly active in supporting Grace Bible Institute, so perhaps the program naturally transmitted some of its fundamentalist convictions.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps some members felt that participating in revival meetings and tuning into the radio broadcasts of Epp and other radio evangelists gave them the stirring feeling that they were a part of the “broader movement of believers that extended beyond their local church and even their local community.”<sup>89</sup>

## Revivals

Fundamentalism developed largely within the revivalist tradition, in which the highest goal was to win souls for Christ.<sup>90</sup> Among the various Mennonites, fundamentalism took hold only after some Mennonite “awakenings” or “quickenings,” when American Mennonites borrowed heavily from revivalistic and other American Protestants.<sup>91</sup> Revivalism is a close relative of Pietism as both stress the importance of a conversion experience (usually after a

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<sup>85</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen; Stanley Voth of North Newton, Kans., interview by author, 5 December 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen.

<sup>87</sup> Stanley Voth.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Kuhlmann, *The Story of Grace: A Brief History of the Founding and Growth of Grace College of the Bible, 1943-1978* (Omaha: Grace College of the Bible, Inc., 1980), 134.

<sup>89</sup> Jared S. Burkholder, “Fundamentalism and Freedom: The Story of Congregational Mennonite Church and Calvary Mennonite Church, 1935-55” (M. A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2000), 53.

<sup>90</sup> George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 110; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 80.

<sup>91</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 67.

crisis) and the “immediate, personal, subjective religious experience.”<sup>92</sup> In the western frontier of the late eighteenth and early twentieth century—and Henderson was in that frontier—revivalism had a certain appeal. “Amid insecurities and isolation of frontier life, the revivalistic and evangelistic fervor created communal bonding and a sense of certainty in an uncertain and unpredictable environment.”<sup>93</sup>

For the most part, revivalism ran counter to Mennonitism due to its “manipulative emotionalism, flamboyant preaching, and prideful publicizing of one’s experience or of numbers of souls saved. It emphasized individual salvation rather than discipleship in community. It separated the salvation experience from Christian nurture carried on by pastors, families, and congregations.”<sup>94</sup> Mennonites believed that the believer’s choice to follow Christ was important, but a traumatic experience or ostentatious display of conversion as not the test of being saved. One should be repentant, be baptized, and become a member of a local church community where one was accountable to that group.<sup>95</sup>

All of the Mennonite churches in Henderson held their own revivals, or “evangelistic meetings” as Bethesda called them, which served to energize and inspire the congregation.<sup>96</sup> The Mennonite Brethren church in Henderson experienced a “great revival” in 1889 when Peter Wedel and Cornelius Janzen preached and sang for five weeks, and a second revival took place in the community in 1905 resulting in six converts to the MB church despite the absence of any official evangelist.<sup>97</sup> The Ebenezer church, as a pietistic group that emphasized a conversion experience and renewal, held revivals early in the twentieth century. Membership in this

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<sup>92</sup> Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: a Community Paradigm*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pa. and Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1987), 161.

<sup>93</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 154.

<sup>94</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 108.

<sup>95</sup> Hostetler, *American Mennonites*, 151-2.

<sup>96</sup> Bethesda Record Book #3, minutes of the ministerial council, 25 June 1945, 199.

<sup>97</sup> Voth, *Henderson Mennonites*, 79.

congregation had historically been unstable. The youth were especially prone to leave the church, and this was a burden of prayer for many years. But in 1914, G. T. Thiessen and later P.A. Friesen conducted in-church revivals and almost all of the young people “were saved, and united with the church. From then on, with few exceptions, our young people united with our church and a number of the young people of the others [other Mennonite churches in town] have come to us.”<sup>98</sup> Revivalism for the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren was not only a way to keep their youth and adults in the church, but it was also successful at drawing in new members from the surrounding community—even from the Bethesda membership.

One of the leading revival ministers in the EMB conference was George P. Schultz, who conducted revival meetings all over the US and helped other EMB churches “get their young people saved” as well as attract new members into the church.<sup>99</sup>

In 1916 during the ministry of G.P. Schultz the Lord gave us a gracious, prayed-down revival. Many were saved from the surrounding community, even though only a few of them united with our group. This has also been the experience in revival meetings in later years. In 1924, while G.P. Schultz was with us, the Lord again blest with abundant results.<sup>100</sup>

The revival activity became an important endeavor of the Ebenezer church in Henderson and in the conference as a whole.

The arrival of Rev. J. R. Barkman to the Ebenezer church in 1933 signaled the continuation of the revival tradition, only with a significant change. Educated at Moody Bible Institute, Barkman had encountered the evangelical and fundamentalist strains of American Protestantism that were drastically different than anything Henderson’s Mennonites had ever seen.<sup>101</sup> The citizens of Henderson, Bethesda Mennonite Church members included, experienced

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<sup>98</sup> Epp, “A Historical Sketch,” 90-1.

<sup>99</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 102.

<sup>100</sup> Epp, “A Historical Sketch,” 91.

<sup>101</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 137.

their first major taste of non-Mennonite, aggressive, chiliastic revivalism in 1934. In June, Barkman organized and promoted a large-scale revival in Henderson. Large tents were set up west of South Main Street where there was ample room, and everyone, regardless of which church they attended, was invited to the meetings. The name of the featured speaker for this grand event was Rev. Lacour.<sup>102</sup> He was not a Mennonite, but a very forceful and charismatic revivalist who preached a “fire and brimstone” message about the need for everyone to accept Jesus Christ as Lord or perish in the flames. Elva Janzen, who attended the event as a young girl, remembers being very frightened by the loud voice of the speaker—no doubt there were others who felt the same because of the content of the message.<sup>103</sup> Many people attended these tent meetings, especially on weekends, and they drew people from all over the area. Some attended purely out of curiosity, while others were very dedicated and attended every night of the week.

Rev. Lacour was a very effective preacher. The two-week long revival influenced the lives of many people; even some who were members of Bethesda were so moved that they transferred their membership to the Ebenezer Church.<sup>104</sup> This did little to work at healing the relations between members of the two churches. Tent revival meetings were divisive in the community and in Bethesda. Those who went were tempted to view themselves as “better Christians” than those who did not attend, or those who did not react with the expected enthusiasm and join in the “whooping and the hollering.”<sup>105</sup>

That an aggressive, non-Mennonite evangelist would come into a Mennonite community to preach in the 1930s is an example of how the broader American Protestant movement was

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<sup>102</sup> Those with whom I spoke could not recall much about who Rev. Lacour was or where he came from. Some have said that he was from a college in Oskaloosa, Iowa; Elmer and Bertha Friesen. In *Leaving Anabaptism*, 154, Calvin Redekop speaks of an E. A. Lacour who held a revival campaign in the 1930s that included Mountain Lake High School in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. It is almost certain that this is the same Lacour as spoken of above, but Redekop was unable to produce any more information on him.

<sup>103</sup> Elva and Walter Janzen of Henderson, Nebr., interview by author, 23 October 2005.

<sup>104</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen.

<sup>105</sup> Elva and Walter Janzen.

finding its way into the small, ethnic community. That avenue was paved most of all by the Ebenezer church and the education of its ministers in non-Mennonite institutions (like Barkman's alma mater Moody) that taught premillennialism, the inerrancy of Scripture, and not traditional Mennonite values like nonviolence and discipleship. Even a singing quartet from Moody Bible Institute was present and sang at that 1934 revival meeting.<sup>106</sup> American Evangelical institutions like Moody found their way into Mennonite circles through revivalism.

Robert O. Epp says that the revivalist's message fell on ready listeners, partly because of the depression.<sup>107</sup> Others agree, testifying that many people from Bethesda attended the tent meetings.<sup>108</sup> But many members of Bethesda, especially the leadership, always maintained a skeptical attitude towards the revival. H. D. Epp, elder of Bethesda, was very critical of Rev. Lacour and the whole event in general. His opinion of alter calls was very low, and he criticized Lacour for using tricks in his tactics on stage. Elder Epp felt uneasy with the way Lacour compared himself to the Apostle Paul, how he openly criticized those who did not like revivals, nor did he find value in the loud and obnoxious form of American Protestantism that Lacour brought to the community.<sup>109</sup> Fellow minister Rev. A. W. Friesen also spoke critically of the tent revival style. The Sunday after the revival, he said to the congregation that the faith of their forefathers had been carried out in a different way by those men at the meeting, which was essentially a polite way of criticizing the event.<sup>110</sup>

Apparently a significant number of Bethesda members took issue with the idea of baptizing in church those who responded affirmatively to the alter calls of Lacour's revival week. Perhaps they were concerned that those who had participated were simply caught up in

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<sup>106</sup> Carl Epp.

<sup>107</sup> Epp, *One Hundred Years*, 20.

<sup>108</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen, Walter and Elva Janzen, and Stanley Voth.

<sup>109</sup> Carl Epp.

<sup>110</sup> Elva and Walter Janzen.

the excitement of the event and were not truthfully prepared for the gravity of a lifelong Christian commitment. Friesen is said to have agreed with that sentiment.<sup>111</sup>

H. D. Epp and A. W. Friesen reflect the general attitude of the majority of Bethesda members towards the revivals. It seems that they, like other older Mennonites in the community, identified more with the *Stille im Lande* (the Quiet in the Land) temperament that defined certain Mennonite traditions, but was dissipating among the new generation. Although many members attended, there was uncertainty and distrust towards this American movement and those members walked away from their first tent session feeling uneasy. Others reacted with overwhelming enthusiasm and even decided to transfer their membership to the Ebenezer church.<sup>112</sup> Since the church leadership offered only a few statements of dislike for the event (and some of those were only made privately), Bethesda's constituents were left to talk amongst themselves about their reactions. Everyone knew who stood where on the issue, and, as people who shied away from confrontation and conflict, they tended to share their opinions only with those of similar opinion.

In the 1950s, Geroge Brunk II and his brother Lawrence brought their "revival fire" to Henderson. They were MCs, and Brunk was not quite as judgmental or self-serving as Lacour, yet he carried a heavy, fundamentalist-leaning message about conversion and salvation. His father had argued in the MC periodical *Sword and Trumpet* that "Modernists deny the essentials of God's part...and Calvinists deny the essentials of man's side, but Mennonites have held to both"—quite a "middle of the road" position.<sup>113</sup> He believed that MCs were more fundamentalist than the fundamentalists themselves, for Mennonites upheld the Biblical fundamentals of nonconformity and nonresistance in addition to the others. Brunk was also an

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<sup>111</sup> Carl Epp.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> George R. Brunk, "The Drift," *Sword and Trumpet* 1 (January, 1929), 12.

“ardent advocate, among many other MC leaders, of premillennialism if not always dispensationalism,” which was key to fundamentalists.<sup>114</sup> George II inherited some of this thought from his father and it came up in his revivals and later in his books.<sup>115</sup> This is all very interesting considering that Bethesda possibly played a significant role in organizing this community-wide revival.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps by this time there was a greater support base for fundamentalism, which is entirely possible considering that Grace Bible Institute was already established and expanding, or Bethesda was simply becoming more comfortable with using revivals as an expression of their emphasis on missions and outreach.

By the mid 1930s, Bethesda held its own revivals, called “evangelistic meetings,” in the church. Speakers for these events were Mennonites, but they ranged from the more liberal to near-fundamentalist. Many times Bethesda contacted Bethel College faculty and staff to speak, such as Abraham Warkentine and David C. Wedel.<sup>117</sup> One such “liberal” speaker was John E. Hartzler, evangelist and president of Goshen College (1913-18) and later Witmarsum Theological Seminary in Bluffton, Ohio (1921-31), who spoke at Bethesda for two days in September of 1936.<sup>118</sup> He had earlier been virtually expelled from the MC conference for charges of “modernism,” sustained numerous attacks from John Horsch and Harold S. Bender for that reasons and others, and from 1921 on Hartzler spent his time and energy working and

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<sup>114</sup> Rodney Sawatsky, “The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Nonresistance 1908-1944,” M. A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1973, 73-4.

<sup>115</sup> See George R. Burnk II, *A Trumpet Sound: a Crisis Among Mennonites on the Doctrine of Christ* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites), 1988 and *A Crisis Among Mennonites: in Education, in Publication* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sword and Trumpet), 1983.

<sup>116</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen.

<sup>117</sup> As editor of the *Sunday School Quarterly*, Warkentine received criticism from “fundamentalists” like C. H. Suckau, pastor of the Mennonite church in Berne, Indiana, for being too theologically liberal in the *Quarterly*, and yet Bethesda leadership preferred speakers like him over ones like Suckau, see Jeff A. Steely, “Cornelius Herman Suckau: Mennonite Fundamentalist?” *Mennonite Life* 44 (March 1989), 18 and Bethesda Record Book #3, special business meeting minutes, 8 September 1936, 119.

<sup>118</sup> Bethesda Record Book #3, special business meeting minutes, 8 September 1936, 119.

fellowshipping within the GC branch.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps he fit best in the General Conference anyways, considering his progressive reputation and anti-doctrinal stance that “the most erroneous view one can take of religion is that it is one unchanging body of dogma.”<sup>120</sup>

Interestingly, in 1940, the Bethesda leadership elected not to invite Hartzler to speak a second time because he was “not too well known around here” and it would be expensive to pay for his transportation from Ohio to Henderson.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps his first visit had not been effective enough to leave a significant impact on the congregation. Nevertheless, it is clear that Bethesda leadership thought somewhat favorably of Hartzler, favorably enough to consider inviting him a second time, which suggests that they resonated more with his “liberal” theology than with that of Barkman and Lacour, to whom Bethesda leadership had negative reactions.

That there was disagreement between the leadership and some congregational members over what kind of speakers should be allowed to come to Bethesda can be seen in the minutes of a ministerial council meeting in 1947. At that meeting it was moved and seconded that if the request came again to have Rev. Izacarias P. Carles speak in the church, the council would not approve either his coming and “speaking to the general audience” nor of taking a collection of money for him.<sup>122</sup> Nothing is known of whom this Rev. Carles was (one can be certain that he was not a General Conference evangelist or even a Mennonite), but he clearly made a very negative impression on the entire ministerial staff. He clearly spoke in the congregation at one point in time at the request of someone or some group in Bethesda and not at the initiative of the leadership; he also must have been popular with at least some members to warrant the council’s concern that they would receive another request for him to return. Bethesda leadership clearly

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<sup>119</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 265.

<sup>120</sup> John E. Hartzler as quoted in *ibid.*, 264.

<sup>121</sup> Bethesda Record Book #3, minutes of the ministers and deacons, 18 August 1940, 192.

<sup>122</sup> Bethesda Record Book #3, minutes of the ministerial council, 24 March 1947, 206.

was not in favor of that happening and they intended to enforce their position. It is implied that if that group who appreciated his message wanted to hear him and support him financially, they were welcome to do it on their own separate from the church. Bethesda's leaders had limits on what was acceptable to be taught at the church, perhaps having learned a lesson from their encounter with Lacour.

Erland Waltner, a moderate who taught at Mennonite Biblical Seminary and was earlier paradoxically courted by both Bethel and GBI to teach at their institutions, was invited to lead Bethesda's "evangelistic meetings" in 1945.<sup>123</sup> They even requested in 1948 that he consider assuming the position of a full time pastor in the church.<sup>124</sup> His appeal to the ministerial leadership of Bethesda likely lay not just in his remarkable preaching ability, but perhaps also in his ability to satisfy both the fundamentalist and progressive factions within the church.

The point here is that Bethesda leadership and a majority of its members favored moderate speakers like Waltner over those on the fringes of the fundamentalist-modernist spectrum. Hartzler was only asked to speak once and denied a second trip for practical reasons, and Lacour, Barkman, and Carles fared much poorer than that. This "middle road" reflects Bethesda's theological diversity and the leaderships' desire to avoid controversial "modern" or "fundamentalist" speakers.

## **Community Bible School**

Bethesda's ambivalent reaction towards the fundamentalist-modernist debate can also be seen in a particular event involving EMB pastor Rev. Barkman and the Henderson Bible School.

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<sup>123</sup> James C. Juhnke, "Preparation of a leader: Erland Waltner from Dakota to Elkhart, *The Work is Thine, O Christ: in Honor of Erland Waltner*, ed. June Alliman Yoder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2002), 3-12. David Wedel of Bethel College was at the same time asked to be Elder at Bethesda, see Bethesda Record Book #3, minutes of the ministerial council, 25 June 1945, 199.

<sup>124</sup> Bethesda Record Book #3, minutes of the ministerial council, 13 Jan 1948, 209.

Upon their arrival to Nebraska, education was one of the settlers' main concerns. Having come from a situation in Russia where Mennonites had full control over their schools, it should not come as a surprise that they were very interested in starting education right away.<sup>125</sup> Early on students either attended one-room schoolhouses that dotted the countryside or they met in homes. Education focused on German, reading, the Bible, and sometimes mathematics. By 1888, the state of Nebraska organized District 95 and built a one-room schoolhouse in town.<sup>126</sup> Before long, most children attended the public school.

The German language and culture was an integral part of Russian Mennonites' identity. Every child grew up speaking only *Plautdietsch* or "Low" German. Families spoke it at home, at church, throughout the town, and the only Bible they read was Martin Luther's German translation; they also ate traditional German food and retained some German clothing—it was part of their distinctiveness. But the American public school system insisted on "Americanizing" all immigrants, and the government quickly forbade anything but English to be spoken on the schoolgrounds.

In 1900, Bethesda church began to consider starting a Bible school that would essentially serve as an alternative to the community high school, which many parents felt was unnecessary, and also preserve *Plautdietsch*. Education past the eighth grade was neither required nor practical for farming families, but the Bible school educated some youth who would have otherwise receive nothing but the lessons of the farm. By 1902 a building was completed and the *Fortsbidungsschule*, "preparatory school," began its first term. Over the next 30 years it would go from being primarily run by Bethesda to a community-wide endeavor in which teachers from

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<sup>125</sup> In fact, education was another highly significant reason why so many Mennonites emigrated after Russia adopted domestic policies that attempted to "Russify" all non-Russian ethnic groups in order to create a more unified—a more Russian—nation took away most of the autonomy Mennonite schools experienced, and, most importantly, restricted the use of the German language.

<sup>126</sup> Voth, *Henderson Mennonites*, 88.

other congregations were involved, including Rev. Barkman and Cornelius Wall from the EMB church.

But in 1934, the year after his arrival to the community and the same year as the Lacour tent revival he sponsored, Barkman's involvement with the school, and with Bethesda, reached a low. In August the Bethesda School Committee invited Wall to discuss Barkman's involvement in the school for the coming winter term. The minutes of the meeting state that "strong opposition regarding teacher Barkman in the Bethesda congregation" developed over the summer, so the committee inquired if Wall would continue to teach without Barkman's assistance; he declined, citing hesitancy to do so without Barkman.<sup>127</sup> But the committee was not satisfied with this since they so strongly objected to Barkman's continued involvement in the school.

Intent on confronting the committee about their reservations about him, Barkman requested to be present at the next meeting. At that meeting the committee declined to "list [or] refer to any items of opposition to Br. Barkman since this ten[s]ion happened." In response Barkman expressed his remorse, and he confessed that he "realized what happened which is evident. He begged for forgiveness."<sup>128</sup> Despite the apology, the committee insisted that he not be involved with the school. At the next meeting, the trustees met with the church leadership and moved that "it would be best for Teacher Barkman not to be connected with Bethesda Church for the year 1934-35." The motion was accepted.<sup>129</sup>

It is not entirely clear what caused Bethesda church to develop such a strong prejudice against Barkman. It would be convenient to link it to his push for the tent revival with Rev.

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<sup>127</sup> "Minutes of the German Bible School, 1923-34," typed copy of original, trans. Emil W. Friesen (1981), Box 13 entitled "Bethesda History," Bethesda Mennonite Church archives, Henderson, Nebr., 6-7.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 6.

Lacour only a month earlier, but that connection cannot be made with great integrity. Perhaps after 50 years the wounds from the bitter split between Bethesda and Ebenezer had not yet healed; but that argument does not account for Bethesda's enthusiasm for Cornelius Wall, who was also from the Ebenezer church, to teach at the school.

The Bethesda School Committee minutes point to something else. One entry concerning the school and Barkman's involvement records a reference to "prayer meetings conducted by students of [the] Bible School in summer months." Apparently, some teachers of the school held prayer meetings at the school with the students that summer without permission to do so, and it was alleged that "church propaganda had been discussed and was encouraged by [the] teachers." However, the teachers denied any wrongdoing.<sup>130</sup> What is meant by "church propaganda" is not clear, but one can surmise that it refers either to negative remarks about Bethesda or to theological statements that Bethesda did not approve of. Perhaps the teachers criticized Bethesda for its lax discipline, its mode of baptism, or even the church's failure to embrace Pietist or more charismatic components of worship. Maybe Barkman was inconspicuously trying to teach the premillennialism or dispensationalism he received at Moody; however, this is purely speculation. Whatever it was, Barkman was not very popular with Bethesda leadership. But he would later be involved in a venture that would have an even greater effect promoting fundamentalism at Bethesda: Grace Bible Institute

## **Colleges and Premillennial Dispensationalism**

J. R. Barkman attended Moody Bible Institute from 1929-1932, after having spent a year at the University of Manitoba in 1922-23. Moody educated a large number of EMB leaders since the conference preferred Bible colleges above any other institutions—even Mennonite

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 8.

colleges. Schools like Moody, Chicago Theological Seminary, Tabor College (a Mennonite Brethren college in Hillsboro, Kansas), Northwestern Bible School, and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles were highly recommended by the EMB conference, but Moody seemed to rise above the rest as a favored destination—especially in the 1910s and 1930s.<sup>131</sup> EMBs admitted that they did not agree with all of the positions that those institutions took, especially on topics such as nonresistance and eternal security, but they were enthused by the institutions' position on the Bible in comparison to Mennonite schools' positions which tended to be dangerously unorthodox.

As Calvin Redekop notes, the favoritism EMB leadership showed for Bible colleges over Mennonite institutions had a noticeable effect on the conference, which was at the time the Defenseless Mennonite Brethren in Christ of North America (DMB).<sup>132</sup>

The leaders who attended the Bible institutes and schools transmitted this new evangelical emphasis into the local congregations and the Bible schools being spawned in the various Mennonite settlements in which DMB congregations were located and participated.<sup>133</sup>

This is exactly what was going on at the Ebenezer church in Henderson during this time. Under Barkman the church began to move away from its traditions and Anabaptism in general, as seen in his introduction of Rev. Lacour to the community and the practice of baptism by immersion in the Ebenezer church.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 137.

<sup>132</sup> The Evangelical Mennonite Brethren have changed the name of their conference numerous times. In 1889, facing the militaristic pressures of World War I, it changed from the Conference of United Mennonite Brethren of North America to the Defenseless Mennonite Brethren in Christ of North America. Then in 1937 members changed the name to the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference. The change from the descriptor *Defenseless* to *Evangelical* denotes the movement of the group away from pacifist and other Anabaptist principles and toward a single minded emphasis on evangelism and “saving souls.” In 1987 the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren made a change that signified their departure from Anabaptism altogether, calling themselves instead the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches (FEBC), see *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>134</sup> Epp, “A Historical Sketch,” 92.

One might suspect that premillennialism followed him there as well. His education at Moody Bible Institute undoubtedly brought him into contact with that teaching, and possibly even dispensationalism,<sup>135</sup> Barkman's passionate involvement in GBI also points to his premillennial dispensationalism interests. Through his work in the community, managing Grace Children's Home, and his brief involvement with Bethesda in the Community Bible School, it is possible that he was responsible for introducing this doctrine to some Bethesda members, but, again, that is not certain. Many of them recall that premillennial dispensationalism was a topic of discussion in the church, but not from the pulpit—it was never supported by church leaders. So it must have come from somewhere else. But as for the membership, everyone had their own opinion on the issue that they kept to themselves or within their circle of friends.<sup>136</sup>

Some members of Bethesda were drawn to fundamentalism, or at least in this case fundamentalism by Trollinger's definition, essentially an emphasis on premillennial dispensationalism, through the writings of Cyrus I. Scofield, specifically his *Reference Bible*.<sup>137</sup> It was a very popular book in the beginning of the century and it introduced thousands of Americans to John Nelson Darby's brand of premillennial dispensationalism. Part of the attraction to the text was its useful cross-referencing system which helped readers track Biblical themes throughout the text, but readers inevitably encountered dispensationalism as well.<sup>138</sup> Once again, church leadership did not speak out for or against the *Scofield Reference Bible*, yet some individuals possessed and used the book at their own discretion.

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<sup>135</sup> Dwight L. Moody had some dispensationalist influences, see Mark Sarver, "Modern Dispensationalism, a Biblical Analysis, Part 3," [http://www.sermonlinks.com/Sermons/Dispensationalism/DP\\_3.htm](http://www.sermonlinks.com/Sermons/Dispensationalism/DP_3.htm) (accessed 29 March 2006); Moody Bible Institute's first superintendent Reuben Torrey, was a strong premillennial dispensationalist; later, president James M. Gray was a premillennialist and a renowned figure in prophetic interpretation, and under his presidency the school taught premillennialism (though not always dispensationalism), see Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 44 and 145.

<sup>136</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*; Water and Elva Janzen.

<sup>138</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen.

Many of those members who were drawn to this line thought sent their children to schools outside of the conference to receive educations that supported it or were at least free from modernism. In 1940, six Bethesda members attended Moody Bible Institute while eight studied at Bethel College.<sup>139</sup> This might be a good indicator of the majority/minority complex within Bethesda that Sawatsky describes, for where a minority preferred Bible schools over Mennonite colleges, a greater number stayed within the conference and attended Bethel.

Bethesda's leadership, however, held fairly strongly to the belief that Mennonite youth should attend Mennonite colleges, and among those the GC-affiliated schools were most encouraged. In the mid 1940s, Bethesda member Helena Siebert attended Moody Bible Institute after graduating from the Freeman Academy in Freeman, South Dakota, a Mennonite school. Her parents had convinced her to attend Moody because it offered discounted (or even free) tuition for students who scored high grades in high school, which she had.<sup>140</sup> She intended to do mission work with the General Conference after college, but when she asked Bethesda for a letter of recommendation, which was a standard part of mission work applications for GCs, the church denied her request because she had not attended a Mennonite school.<sup>141</sup> Bethesda leadership was clearly dedicated to Mennonite institutions of higher learning, and did not see Bible schools like Moody to be appropriate alternatives. If someone was going to do service under the GC and represent the conference, only a Mennonite education could be trusted to

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<sup>139</sup> A majority of youth actually attended state schools like the University of Nebraska or York College. This is probably because they offered agricultural classes (although Bethel offered some), were cheaper, and were closer to home. "Echoes," Aug. 1940, from cabinet # II, drawer 4, folder Echoes – 1940-1950, held in Bethesda Mennonite Church archives, Henderson, Nebr.

<sup>140</sup> The fact that Moody offered a discount on tuition for good students challenges my assertion that Bethesda families that sent their children there did so because the school was not "tainted with modernism" like Mennonite schools were, or so some believed (see works by Horsch). However, considering the widespread accusations that Bluffton and Bethel were theologically modernist or liberal schools, it is highly likely that some Bethesda families shared this sentiment and sent their children to Moody because it was perceived to be more "orthodox."

<sup>141</sup> According to Walt and Elva, Siebert went on to serve 40 years in Africa under a non-Mennonite mission organization.

provide an appropriate education and Bethesda upheld that practice. The constituency that disagreed with that stance and preferred Moody or other Bible colleges was probably very pleased when Grace Bible Institute opened its doors in 1943.

## **Grace Bible Institute**

The fundamentalist-modernist debate among Mennonites was most perceptible in their colleges; the controversy among GCs reached the boiling point in the 1940s with the founding of Grace Bible Institute. The introduction of a new school in the GC was a loud and clear statement to other GC institutions that they were straying from the straight and narrow path and had fallen prey to the fallacies of modernism. Sawatsky states that GBI was “symbolic of those alternative institutions and programs established by dissenting GC members during these controversial years and thereafter.”<sup>142</sup> In the end, though it claimed to be both a Mennonite and an inter-denominational school, GBI was really a school for GCs of fundamentalist bent.<sup>143</sup>

In the early 1940s, there was a small but growing constituency in the General Conference who felt a strong need for a Bible college. This group perceived GC institutions of higher learning as being too “modernistic” and “secular,” and desired a new school to teach young people the Bible and how to evangelize and do mission work. In 1922 the Western District Conference Committee for Recommendations to Schools of Higher Learning sent out a questionnaire to all Mennonite institutions in order to ascertain their attitude towards modernism.<sup>144</sup> Bluffton was the only school to respond inadequately. Paul Toews points out that three features of the Mennonite landscape of higher learning troubled the more fundamentalistic Mennonite leaders: 1) The Bible departments of the Mennonite colleges were

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<sup>142</sup> Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 69.

<sup>143</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 79.

<sup>144</sup> John Horsch, *Is the Mennonite Church of America Free from Modernism?* (Scottsdale, Pa.: the author, 1926), 10.

becoming increasingly liberal or modernistic in their theology and secular in their educational programs; 2) Mennonite youth who wanted to attend a Bible school preferred to go to non-Mennonite schools (such as Moody or Northwestern U.) after which they tended to work with non-Mennonite missions organizations; 3) Mennonite colleges' responses to World War II.<sup>145</sup>

Two GC leaders who expressed the most dissatisfaction with existing GC colleges and were highly influential in the establishment of GBI were Henry P. Krehbiel and Cornelius H. Suckau. Born in 1862 as the son of Christian Krehbiel, the momentous GC pioneer, H. P. would himself become an important figure in the General Conference. He was a prolific writer, GC historian, editor of *Der Herold*, founder and elder of Burrton Mennonite Church in Burrton, Kansas, member of the Kansas state legislature, and founder of the *Mennonite Weekly Review*.<sup>146</sup>

H. P. Krehbiel criticized Mennonite colleges for failing to provide a proper education to Mennonite students. Instead of teaching the heart, they taught only the head; they only taught youth about worldly things while nothing was given to them of the “eternal Kingdom of God and the realm of the soul.”<sup>147</sup> He criticized Bethel College in particular for letting authorities outside of the Mennonite church set their standards, and for only focusing on fitting into the educational program of the state. Krehbiel lamented that basically all GC educational institutions—Bethel, Bluffton, and Bethany Theological Seminary (a Church of the Brethren school in Chicago that was favored by many GC officials)—were designed to offer purely secular instruction. Was this the role of a faith-based institution of learning?<sup>148</sup> He attacked Bethany for being “thoroughly in harmony with the hopeless unbelief in the dependability of the Bible and in Jesus Christ as the Son of the Virgin Mary...the Savior from sin.” As far as he was concerned, both Bethany and

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<sup>145</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 79.

<sup>146</sup> Guide to H. P. Krehbiel Collection, MLA-MS-12, Box 12, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.

<sup>147</sup> “Overture,” 20 October 1931, H. P. Krehbiel Collection, MLA-MS-12, Box 12, Folder 78.

<sup>148</sup> H. P. Krehbiel Collection, MLA-MS-12, Box, 12, Folder 78.

Bluffton College were in the same camp as the Unitarians and the atheists (he spared Bethel of that charge for some reason). As schools infested with modernism and liberalism, they had committed apostasy and were spreading it to Mennonite youth.<sup>149</sup> In Krehbiel's opinion, these were not schools fit for the training of true Christian believers.

Krehbiel had something else in mind. He had a vision of a school that would devote itself to instruction in things biblical, Christian, spiritual, and ethical, as well as to the "cultivation of a devout, godly life, and to the training of believing persons in practical soul saving and Christian benevolent work."<sup>150</sup> For 25 years H. P. Krehbiel prayed and petitioned others for a "Mennonite Christian Worker's School"—an institution dedicated to producing Christian workers to fill the ranks of those committed to spreading the Gospel, teaching the unprivileged, and helping those in need. He hoped and prayed for "new forces to appear whom the Lord sends into his harvestfield."<sup>151</sup> In 1931 he worked out a "Provisional Constitution for the Mennonite Christian Workers School," and began to organize meetings for those he thought might be interested in making it a reality.<sup>152</sup>

On April 6, 1932, Krehbiel, along with a few others, went so far as to propose that the Western District Conference repossess a \$200,000 endowment that Bethel College had received a few years earlier and use that money to start a new Bible school. The motion came to a vote, and a narrow 149-131 pro-Bethel vote blocked the proposal, keeping it from surely forcing the financially struggling Bethel College to close its doors.<sup>153</sup> The small margin between the votes is striking. Clearly the Western District Conference representatives were divided on the issue of

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<sup>149</sup> H. P. Krehbiel to C. H. Suckau, 16 May 1933, H. P. Krehbiel Collection, MLA-MS-12, Box 6, Folder 38.

<sup>150</sup> H. P. Krehbiel Collection, MLA-MS-12, Box 12, Folder 78.

<sup>151</sup> H. P. Krehbiel Collection, MLA-MS-12, Box 6, Folder 38; "Overture," 20 October 1931, H. P. Krehbiel Collection, MLA-MS-12, Box 12, Folder 78.

<sup>152</sup> Steely, "Cornelius Herman Suckau," 18-9.

<sup>153</sup> Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity*, 69. Steely reports the amount at stake was \$100,000, see "Cornelius Herman Suckau," 19.

modernism in Bethel and the need for a new Bible school in the General Conference, and the same could also be said of the members of Bethesda. Not everyone had a good opinion of the college. Sadly, Krehbiel would pass away just three years before his dream for a Christian worker's school would be realized in Grace Bible Institute.

Cornelius H. Suckau, born outside of Newton, Kansas in 1881, briefly attended Bethel College (he would eventually complete a degree there) and went into foreign missions in India where his fundamentalist views created conflict between him, his coworkers, and the General Conference.<sup>154</sup> Later he was pastor of the First Mennonite Church of Berne, Indiana, where his views on premillennial dispensationalism and eternal security (the idea that once one believes in Jesus Christ, she/he acquires salvation and can not lose it) did little to salve the wounds of division that had developed under the previous pastor P. R. Schroeder. He also had anti-General Conference sentiments, put down GC colleges in favor of schools like Wheaton College and Moody Bible Institute, supported non-combatant military service over Civilian Public Service and active military duty, and was generally preoccupied with purging Mennonitism of modernism.<sup>155</sup> Suckau “was in correspondence with John Gresham Machen, who was fighting the battle in the Presbyterian Church. He became convinced that the place to fight the battle was in a ‘Citadel of Faith,’ an institution where fundamental truths could be taught to dedicated students who would then multiply such efforts.”<sup>156</sup>

Suckau expressed a vision for a Bible school similar to Krehbiel's, and likewise grieved that none of the existing Mennonite colleges met his criteria causing Mennonite youth to attend other Bible colleges instead or, worse yet, be corrupted by Bethel or Bluffton's liberal teachings. C. H. Wedel, the first president of Bethel College, shared that concern and remarked at one point

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<sup>154</sup> Steely, “Cornelius Herman Suckau,” 15-21.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Kuhlmann, *The Story of Grace*, 70.

that Mennonites tended more often than not to “leave the Mennonite fold after earning advanced degrees” in non-Mennonite institutions.<sup>157</sup> In 1943, Suckau and others felt that the leadership of the GC conference and the faculty of GC colleges were mostly modernists. Their claims were not entirely unfounded and may have stemmed from incidents like Goshen College’s reorganization, the steady stream of MC professors deemed to be “too liberal” from MC schools like Goshen to GC institutions like Bluffton or Bethel, or the “Daniel Explosion” and Cornelius H. Wedel’s adoption of modern methods of historical and biblical study at Bethel.<sup>158</sup> Krehbiel and Suckau were concerned about the teachings of modernist materials in the conference that they were a part of, and they thought of themselves as “purging Mennonites of the alien ideologies that had crept in through modernism,” to use Toews’ description of Mennonite fundamentalism.<sup>159</sup> Their dissatisfaction with the GC resonated with individuals in many congregations in the Western District Conference as well as in the Northern District, of which Bethesda was a member. There needed to be a restoration of what they considered Mennonite orthodoxy; they needed to undo the damage that the “modernist” GC colleges had been doing; there needed to be a Mennonite Bible School, that would be solely committed to study of the Bible and producing workers and missionaries to go out into the world.<sup>160</sup>

On June 1, 1943, nine men from the General Conference and one man from the EMB church, Rev. Barkman, met in Omaha, Nebraska to prayerfully discuss the possibility of starting a new Bible school. During the course of their meeting, they made plans for a new school, and

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<sup>157</sup> C. H. Wedel, quoted in Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 115.

<sup>158</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 261.

<sup>159</sup> Toews, “Fundamentalist Conflict in Mennonite Colleges,” 244.

<sup>160</sup> Steely, “Cornelius Herman Suckau,” 15.

after a “summer of what seemed to these men to be miraculous events,” Grace Bible Institute opened its doors to twenty-three students.<sup>161</sup>

Six Mennonite conferences supported GBI, including an unenthusiastic GC, and its second president described it as “an inter-Mennonite school [which] affirms its stand as true and loyal to the time-honored Mennonite doctrines.” However, as Redekop notes, this was only a “formal” connection to traditional Mennonite principles as the school was thoroughly fundamentalist in its orientation.<sup>162</sup> According to Redekop

the promoters of Grace reflecting the evangelical/fundamentalist orientation, identified the enemies of the Christian faith as liberalism and modernism, evolution and humanism, the new RSV Bible which appeared in 1940, and the coldness and formalism of the traditional Mennonite teachings and religious life...Premillennialism, dispensationalism, and even holiness also had an impact on the institution.<sup>163</sup>

The school’s doctrinal statement supplies an insight to the school’s fundamentalist nature. The first article states that the Bible is “the infallible Word of God...it is divine revelation, given by the Holy Spirit to holy men of God...verbally inspired in all its parts...and therefore wholly without error as originally given of God,” which is the same kind of language other fundamentalists used to describe the Scriptures.<sup>164</sup> It also declares that those who accept the doctrinal statement expect the “personal, premillennial, and imminent return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;” as for those who do not believe, they can expect, after the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth (the millennium) to “be raised from the dead, and throughout eternity

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>162</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 141.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Grace University, “Our Doctrinal Statement,” Academic Catalogue, [http://www.graceuniversity.edu/catalog/Index\\_Common\\_DoctrinalStatement.htm](http://www.graceuniversity.edu/catalog/Index_Common_DoctrinalStatement.htm) (accessed March 9, 2006).

exist in a state of conscious and endless torment.” It also upholds the doctrine of eternal security, a big step away from traditional Mennonite theology (see Appendix).<sup>165</sup>

Trollinger believes, however, that GBI was not started as an attempt to fight modernism in the General Conference Mennonite Church. Despite the language coming from GBI founders that the conference had been infiltrated by dangerous liberal and modernist ideologies, it is “extremely difficult to find anything approximating theological modernism in the General Conference Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite colleges of the 1930s and 1940s.”<sup>166</sup> This is not meant to say that there were no Mennonite Modernists, but that its influence among Mennonites at that time was minuscule.

Why, then, was GBI founded? In Trollinger’s assessment, it was not because the school’s founders were hypersensitive conservatives who imagined a modernist menace (as the writings of H. P. Krehbiel suggest). Nor were they using fundamentalist rhetoric as a tool to conserve and preserve Mennonite traditions and institutions and to define Mennonite boundaries (as Toews, Juhnke, Sawatsky, and others suggest). Instead, Trollinger argues that GBI supporters were not conservatives, but radical Mennonites who wanted to use Darby’s eschatological schema (dispensationalism) as the center of their theology and to educate others likewise.<sup>167</sup> After all, according to Trollinger, it was because of Suckau’s fervent premillennialist convictions that he was selected to be the school’s first president; GBI was dedicated to the promoting of dispensational premillennialism.<sup>168</sup>

This argument is also supported by the school’s doctrinal statement, which Suckau directed. Twenty percent of the statement is spent spelling out the intricate details of

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<sup>165</sup> Steely, “Cornelius H. Suckau,” 19.

<sup>166</sup> Trollinger, “How John Nelson Darby Went Visiting,” 270.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>168</sup> Kuhlmann had only been an “acting president” until someone could be found to take up the position, see Steely, “Cornelius Herman Suckau,” 19; Trollinger, “How John Nelson Darby Went Visiting,” 271-4.

dispensational premillennialism in Articles XI-XIII (see Appendix). There was absolutely no deviation from this specific interpretation.

Every member of the Board of Trustees, the Advisory Council, and the Faculty is to be in whole-hearted accord with the Unabridged Doctrinal Statement, and is required to subscribe annually in writing to this unabridged Doctrinal Statement. No one shall ever preach or teach at Grace University any doctrine contrary to it. When teaching contrary to this Doctrinal Statement is discovered, the Board of Trustees is required to take action.<sup>169</sup>

In order to teach at or graduate from GBI, one had to annually affirm in writing that one adhered to everything in the statement, and anyone caught teaching otherwise would be removed.<sup>170</sup>

Furthermore, premillennial dispensationalism was a very important doctrine for Suckau. At the very first Bible conference at GBI, Suckau presented a study of the prophetic word in which he used a chart entitled “The Ends of the Ages.”<sup>171</sup> It is entirely plausible for Trollinger to propose that Suckau envisioned a school where dispensational premillennialism could be taught to Mennonite youth who were not encountering it in other Mennonite-sponsored colleges.

However, Trollinger’s argument that it is best to understand GBI’s embrace of fundamentalism not as a defensive mechanism of “anti-modernist conservatives who were trying to preserve orthodoxy in the face of intellectual and cultural changes buffeting and threatening the Mennonite world,” but as a school for promoting premillennial dispensationalism has weaknesses.<sup>172</sup> It is a challenge to other historians’ interpretations of why Mennonites developed fundamentalist principles, namely those who believe it was a tool for denominational

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<sup>169</sup> Grace University, “Our Doctrinal Statement,” Academic Catalogue, [http://www.graceuniversity.edu/catalog/Index\\_Common\\_DoctrinalStatement.htm](http://www.graceuniversity.edu/catalog/Index_Common_DoctrinalStatement.htm) (accessed March 9, 2006).

<sup>170</sup> One exception to this rule existed, which was that one did not have to agree with the eight-word statement on nonviolence buried in the doctrinal statement that said that Christians should abstain from “taking personal vengeance and participating in carnal strife,” see Trollinger, “How John Nelson Darby Went Visiting,” 274 n25 and pages 278-80.

<sup>171</sup> Kuhlman, *Story of Grace*, 81-2.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

conservatives to defend their Mennonitism from modernism.<sup>173</sup> It also flies in the face of H. P. Krehbiel and others' dreams for a Mennonite Christians Workers School that would be free of what they perceived as the modernism that plagued GC institutions. Trollinger's assertion that there was no modernism to be fought in the GC at that time raises an issue of perspective. From a twenty-first century perspective looking back, one might not see modernism in the GC. But some leaders of the 30s and 40s—Krehbiel, Suckau, Barkman and many others—perceived modernism as a very real and present danger, whether or not it actually existed, and so they supported GBI as a way to combat modernism.

John R. Barkman played a direct role in the founding of GBI as one of the ten charter members who met in Omaha. Although he acted as an individual and not on behalf of the EMB church in Henderson, his hopes were that the congregation would support the school and send its youth there.<sup>174</sup> However, the EMB church never supported the school with much more than unofficial moral support. According to Redekop, this was perhaps due to the fact that GBI advertised itself as a thoroughly Mennonite school to enlist Mennonite students, and this emphasis may not have sat well with the “increasingly evangelistic/missions and anti-Mennonite orientation emerging in the EMB conference.”<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, a large number of EMB leaders became GBI staff or members of the board of directors, and this intensified the influence of fundamentalism on the EMB conference and, one can assume on some level, on the community of Henderson.<sup>176</sup> That fundamentalist influence came not only from Barkman, but also from John R. Dick, who was pastor of the EMB church from 1939-41 and later both a faculty member of GBI and EMB conference president. It was at his influence that “many fine young people of

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<sup>173</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 260.

<sup>174</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 141.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 240 n57.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

the EMB denomination in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska were led to attend Grace Bible Institute.”<sup>177</sup>

Within five years of its founding, GBI had 312 (mostly Mennonite) students, which is an impressive student population as far as Bible schools go, not to mention a young one. That was approximately three-fifths of Bethel College’s enrollment and eleven more students than Bluffton had that same year.<sup>178</sup> Thus it is not surprising that the school quickly drew criticism from GC leaders for being a divisive force in the denomination. “The school was siphoning off potential students and monies from denominationally endorsed colleges that could use more of both.”<sup>179</sup> General Conference president C. E. Krehbiel wrote an open letter to GBI before it even opened, questioning the motivation behind the school and inquiring of their dissatisfaction with the GC Board of Education, as well as the Foreign Mission Board. He made it clear that GBI had “no official connection” to the GC, and he urged churches to continue to give their “prayerful and wholehearted support and devotion” first to the various activities authorized by the conference.<sup>180</sup>

In defense of the institution, Rev. P. P. Tschetter wrote an article in the *Mennonite Weekly Review* in 1949 claiming that GBI was “not founded in the interest of only one group or conference of the Mennonite Church; but in the interest of our whole Mennonite constituency.” Grace was simply providing Mennonite youth with a Mennonite Bible college option—something previously lacking—and if they wanted a college degree, there were several other Mennonite colleges they could attend.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Kuhlmann, *Story of Grace*, 55-6.

<sup>178</sup> Trollinger, “How John Nelson Darby Went Visiting,” 268.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Christian E. Krehbiel, “Reply to Inquiries,” *The Mennonite* 58 (Aug. 3, 1943), 14.

<sup>181</sup> P. P. Tschetter, “Grace Bible Institute,” *Mennonite Weekly Review* 27 (January 6, 1949), 8.

GBI appealed to some Bethesda members. Its affiliation with the General Conference (however ambiguous that relationship was) made it more attractive than Moody, and its fundamentalist theological position made it favored above Bethel or Bluffton. Those Bethesda members who received encouragement to attend GBI received it from influences outside of the church since very little support of GBI came from the pulpit.<sup>182</sup> It might have come in the form of revivals and certain speakers who came through, the *Scofield Reference Bible*, Barkman and the EMB church, and fundamentalist-leaning or GBI-supportive radio programming. GBI representatives and students also came to Bethesda on a few occasions to garner support.<sup>183</sup> Those individuals in the congregation who were among the conservative minority Sawatsky describes, or who espoused premillennial dispensationalism, were more easily persuaded to support the school. This sentiment was reciprocated as graduates of the school returned to Bethesda and helped import even more of the fundamentalist spirit into the church, which is exactly what happened in the EMB conference.<sup>184</sup>

As time went on, more members saw GBI as an intrusion on Mennonitism. The school increasingly took measures that placed it farther and farther outside of the Mennonite world theologically. In 1949, course materials deemphasized nonviolence and references to Mennonites began to diminish, disappearing altogether by the 1960s.<sup>185</sup> Students were required to purchase the *Scofield Reference Bible*—the Bible as far as the institution was concerned—and the institution offered no classes on a Gospel, the Gospels, or the life and teachings of Jesus. “Such a deficiency is curious, given that Grace was ostensibly a Mennonite school. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that this curricular curiosity was due primarily to the school’s

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<sup>182</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen.

<sup>183</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen; Carl Epp; Stanley Voth.

<sup>184</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 145.

<sup>185</sup> Trollinger, “How John Nelson Darby Went Visiting,” 278-80.

dispensationalist commitments.”<sup>186</sup> Yet Redekop argues that the GC maintained good support for the school throughout its history and up to the early 1970s when support quickly began to wane.<sup>187</sup> A portion of Bethesda reflected that same sentiment.<sup>188</sup>

Many Mennonites who attended GBI went on to leave Mennonite churches in favor of Baptist, Evangelical Free, or independent Bible churches.<sup>189</sup> This is ironic considering that one of the reasons the school was founded was to keep youth who wanted to attend a Bible college within the Mennonite church. But more than just individuals exited the Mennonite church.

One General Conference Mennonite official who graduated from Grace and who has many good things to say about the school reported that ‘Grace graduates who came back to the General Conference to pastor churches often took them out of the Conference, or, at least, further soured [their congregation] on the Conference.’<sup>190</sup>

Many members of Bethesda, as well as the leadership, were concerned about this very thing happening in their own congregation.<sup>191</sup>

The division in Bethesda over GBI increased during the 1950s and into the 1960s. In the 1940s and 50s, the school sometimes gave musical or other programs in the church. But by the 1960s, Bethesda voted not to extend an invitation to the GBI choir to sing at the church. GBI received invitations from the EMB church, perhaps even the MB church as well, but the institution was always controversial in Bethesda.<sup>192</sup> By the end of the 1960s, the Northern District Conference (NDC) implemented specific criteria that had to be met in order for

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid. 275.

<sup>187</sup> Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 145.

<sup>188</sup> Elmer and Bertha Friesen; Stanley Voth.

<sup>189</sup> Trollinger, “How John Nelson Darby Went Visiting,” 280.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Stanley Voth.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

educational institutions to be allowed to report at the NDC educational board meetings, which excluded GBI.<sup>193</sup>

Overall, the majority of Bethesda members and its leaders supported the General Conference and Bethel College. Bethel was the congregation's official church school, and they pledged their support to it. Even some more fundamentally-oriented members attended Bethel because it was the main school for GC Mennonites in the central States.<sup>194</sup>

During World War II, there was a push in American society for citizens to buy war bonds and support the war effort. Most Mennonites were opposed to any support of the war and could not purchase war bonds out of conscience. The historic peace churches were able to convince the National Service Board for Religious Objectors to offer civilian bonds during the war as an alternative.<sup>195</sup> Bethel College initiated a program where individuals could donate their civilian bonds to the college to help alleviate its considerable debt. An article in the 1942 Bethesda publication "Echoes" encouraged the congregation to participate in this program and cited the following reasons for why it was important to support Bethel: 1) most of Bethesda's missions workers received their education there; 2) many of the leading GC ministers received preparation at Bethel; 3) many of the directors of the C.P.S. camps received preparation there; and 4) Bethel instructed a number of the men who were instrumental in obtaining Conscientious Objector privileges from the government.<sup>196</sup> Two months later, Bethesda donated over \$730 worth of civilian bonds to Bethel—almost a quarter of the entire offering for the month of December.<sup>197</sup>

Bethel College was important not only to Bethesda, but to the GC and all Mennonites because of

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<sup>193</sup> Schmidt, *Northern District Conference*, 170.

<sup>194</sup> Stanley Voth. Paul Kuhlmann reports that half of the ten men who founded GBI attended Bethel at some point, see Kuhlmann, *Story of Grace*, 22-25.

<sup>195</sup> *Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "War Bond," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War\\_bond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_bond) (accessed 25 March 2006).

<sup>196</sup> "Echoes," Oct. 1942.

<sup>197</sup> "Echoes," Dec. 1942.

the amazing people it produced, and most Bethesda members were happy to support the institution.

## **Conclusion**

The fundamentalist-modernist debates played out ambiguously in Bethesda, which is similar to Marsden's conclusion about how fundamentalism interacted with American culture. As a complex and diverse congregation, members naturally reacted to fundamentalism differently. As Sawatsky pointed out about the GC in general, there was a "liberal evangelical" majority and a more fundamentalist-oriented minority in Bethesda, and controversial issues, such as revivalism, Barkman, GBI, and fundamentalism in general, largely split the membership along these lines. Thus, the majority tended to avoid fundamentalism and supported the conference and its activities despite the charges of modernism from some.

If we use Sandeen and Trollinger's definition of fundamentalism as primarily dispensational premillennialism, Bethesda was marginally fundamentalist. Some individuals agreed with that doctrine, owned a copy of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, and attended schools like Moody and GBI where it was emphasized or at least somewhat present. But the majority did not. Neither did anyone speak of premillennial dispensationalism from the pulpit. It was an issue that some members remember their parents talking about, but it was largely, if not entirely, discussed outside and apart from the church. So again we see that the issue of premillennial dispensationalism probably split the membership roughly along Sawatsky's majority/minority dichotomy.

However, Sandeen and Trollinger's emphasis on millennialism diminishes the centrality of militant anti-modernism in the fundamentalist movement, even in the movement among Mennonites, which is the argument of Marsden. Even though there is no evidence of theological

modernism in the GC or at Bethesda during this time that does not mean that there were no individuals who could be considered theological modernists, or that no one was convinced that modernists were present in the congregation (even when there really were none). Those who rallied to the tent revivals, urged the GC to develop a clear doctrinal stance, and disapproved of Bethel College held different theological assumptions than those who did and thought the opposite, and they might have seen the other side as modernists. Yet, there was no John Horsch, C. H. Suckau, or H. P. Krehbiel figure at Bethesda to create sizeable waves over the threat of modernism, and Marsden argues that that the “organizational dynamic of the movement was built around individual leaders.”<sup>198</sup>

Fundamentalism in Bethesda was not denominational conservatism. The revivals, attraction to leaders like Barkman who were educated outside of the denomination, and support of GBI and dispensational premillennialism were not attempts to preserve Mennonite theology or traditions that were lost or being threatened. As a combination of dispensational premillennialism, slight anti-modernism, GC criticism, and perhaps even an attempt to connect to the broader Protestant church, fundamentalism led some Bethesda members out of the conference and away from traditional Mennonite and GC values—a parallel path to that of GBI. At the same time, many of them stayed in the church and the conference. Conceivably that was in part due to Bethesda’s geographical isolation, but perhaps they wanted to influence the rest of the congregation to be persuaded to their point of view.<sup>199</sup>

Fundamentalism constituted a minority in the church. Those in Bethesda who were attracted to fundamentalism and vocalized it were seldom heard beyond their personal enclaves since they were not the ones behind the pulpit (either literally or metaphorically). The

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<sup>198</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 34.

<sup>199</sup> Stanley Voth.

congregation on the whole was comfortable with the General Conference, its values and actions, and its institutions, like Bethel, and they tended to elect church leaders who felt the same.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.; Carl Epp.

## **Appendix**

Grace Bible Institute  
Our Doctrinal Statement<sup>201</sup>

The following is the unabridged doctrinal statement of the University and provides the basis for doctrinal agreement. Each member of the Board of Trustees, Administration, and Faculty is required to subscribe annually to the doctrinal statement. Copies of this document are available from the President's Office.

### **Motto:**

“Other foundations can no man lay than that is laid, which is JESUS CHRIST.” (1 Cor. 3:11)

### **Doctrinal Statement**

Every member of the Board of Trustees, the Advisory Council, and the Faculty is to be in whole-hearted accord with the Unabridged Doctrinal Statement, and is required to subscribe annually in writing to this unabridged Doctrinal Statement. No one shall ever preach or teach at Grace University any doctrine contrary to it. When teaching contrary to this Doctrinal Statement is discovered, the Board of Trustees is required to take action.

## **Article I**

### **The Scriptures**

We believe... That “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16), accepting unreservedly the writings of the Old and the New Testaments as the infallible Word of God (Jn. 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Ps. 119:89).

...That it is divine revelation, given by the Holy Spirit to holy men of God (2 Pet. 1:21; Acts 1:16; Jn. 16:3; 1 Cor. 2:13); verbally inspired in all its parts (Ex. 4:15) and therefore wholly without error as originally given of God (Matt. 5:18; Jn. 10:35); altogether sufficient in itself as our only infallible rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11) and everywhere centering in, and pointing to, the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ of Whom all Scripture testifies (Lk. 24:27, 44; Jn. 5:39; Acts 17:2-3; 18:28).

## **Article II**

### **The Godhead**

We believe...That God is spirit (Jn. 4:24), eternally existing in three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

...That these three are one God (Mk. 12:29), Who is perfect, infinite and eternal in His being, holiness, love, wisdom and power (Ps. 18:30; 147:5; Deut. 33:27; Ps. 135:6); absolutely separate from and above the world as its Creator (Gen. 1:1), yet everywhere present in the world as the Upholder of all things (Ps. 139:1-10; Ps. 104); self-existent and self-revealing (Jn. 5:26; Matt. 11:27).

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<sup>201</sup> Accessible online at [http://www.graceuniversity.edu/catalog/Index\\_Common\\_DoctrinalStatement.htm](http://www.graceuniversity.edu/catalog/Index_Common_DoctrinalStatement.htm) [accessed March 9, 2006].

...That each of the three Persons is worthy of equal honor, obedience and worship (Jn. 1:1-3; Acts 5:3-4; Jn. 5:23).

### **Article III**

#### **God The Father**

We believe...That, although God is the Creator of the universe and of the human race (Gen. 1:1, 26, 27; 2:7, 21, 22; Acts 17:28, 29), He is the Father only of those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior (Jn. 1:12, 13; Gal. 3:26; 1 Jn. 3:2).

We do not believe in the universal Fatherhood of God, nor the universal Brotherhood of man (Jn. 8:42-44; 1 Jn. 5:12).

### **Article IV**

#### **Jesus Christ**

We believe...That the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), the Eternal and Only-begotten Son of God (Ps. 2:7; Jn. 1:18; 8:58), came into the world, as provided and purposed by God, and as pre-announced in the prophecies of the Scriptures (1 Pet. 1:10; Acts 2:23; Gen. 3:15), that he might become the Redeemer of a lost world (Lk. 19:10).

...That without any essential change in His divine Person (Heb. 13:8), He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:35), became a man through the miracle of the Virgin Birth (Matt. 1:23), received a human body and a sinless human nature (Jn. 1:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14, 17; 1 Jn. 3:5) and thus continues forever as both true God and true Man (Col. 2:9; Rev. 22:16), one Person with two natures (Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Tim. 2:5).

...That as a Man He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15; Jn. 8:46).

...That as the perfect Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29) He gave Himself in death upon the Cross (Matt. 20:28; Phil. 2:8), shedding His own precious Blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19), bearing there our sin (1 Pet. 2:24) and suffering its full penalty of divine wrath as our substitute (Isa. 53:5-6; Gal. 3:13).

...That He arose from the dead and was glorified in the same body in which He suffered and died (Jn. 20:25-28; Acts 2:32, 33).

...That as our great High Priest He ascended into heaven (Heb. 4:14; Acts 1:9), there to appear before the face of God as our Advocate and Intercessor (Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1).

...That He will come again (Acts 1:11), first to receive from the earth His own (Jn. 14:3), and then to establish His righteous kingdom upon the earth (Acts 15:14-16).

### **Article V**

#### **The Holy Spirit**

We believe...That the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19), is the divine Agent in nature, revelation and redemption (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; 1 Cor. 2:10; Tit. 3:5).

...That, though omnipresent from all eternity, He took up His abode in the world in a special sense on the Day of Pentecost, dwelling in each and all believers (Acts 2:1-4), baptizing them into one body, the Church of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

...That He will never take His departure from the Church (Jn. 14:16; Eph. 1:14), but is ever present to testify of Christ, seeking to occupy fill the believer with Him (Jn. 15:16; 16:14).

...That His abode in the world, in this special sense, will cease when the Church is completed, and when Christ comes to receive His own (2 Thess. 2:7; Jn. 14:16; Rev. 4:5).

...That in this age certain well-defined ministries are committed to Him, such as: the restraining of evil in the world to the measure of the divine will (2 Thess. 2:7); the convicting of the world with respect to sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:8-11); the regenerating and cleansing of all believers (Jn. 3:5; Tit. 3:5); the indwelling of all who are saved (Rom. 8:9; Jn. 14:16, 17); the anointing of believers to teach them all truth (Jn. 16:13; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27); the sealing of believers unto the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13,14; 4:30); the continued filling for guidance, power and service of those among the saved who are yielded to Him, and who are subject to His will (Eph. 5:18; Acts 4:31); and the bestowal of spiritual gifts upon the members of Christ's body according to His own will (1 Cor. 12:1, 8-11).

## **Article VI**

### **Creation and Fall of Man**

We believe...That man was the direct creation of God (Gen. 2:7; 18-22), spirit and soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23), and not in any sense the product of animal ancestry (1 Cor. 15:39), but made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26, 27).

...That through personal unbelief and disobedience to the revealed will of God man fell (Gen. 2:17, 3:11), became a sinful creature (Mk. 7:21-23), lost his spiritual life (Eph. 4:18), became "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), lives under the righteous judgment and wrath of God (Rom. 1:18; Jn. 3:36) and became subject to the power of the devil (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13).

...That this spiritual death, or total depravity of human nature (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:18), has been transmitted to the entire human race (Gen. 5:3; Rom. 5:12), Jesus Christ only being excepted (Lk. 1:35), so that all are sinners both by nature and by practice (Eph. 2:3; Rom. 3:23) and are essentially and totally unable of themselves to gain recovery or salvation (Rom. 3:20; Jer. 13:23; Jn. 1:13; 2 Cor. 4:4).

## **Article VII**

### **Salvation Through Grace by Faith**

We believe...That our salvation is the free gift of God's grace (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8).

...That we are justified solely on the ground of the shed Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24; Heb. 9:22) who was made sin for us by His substitutionary death on the Cross (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24).

...That salvation is received only by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31; Jn. 3:16).

...That it is neither merited nor secured, in part or whole, by any virtue or work of man (Rom. 4:4, 5; Jn. 6:28, 29), for no repentance, no confession, no feeling, no sincere efforts, no good resolutions, no submission to any rules or ordinances of any church can add in the least to the value of the Blood of Christ, nor be added in any sense to believing as a condition of salvation (Eph. 2:8, 9; Isa. 64:6; Gal. 3:11; Col. 2:13, 14).

...That this salvation has a threefold aspect: salvation from guilt and penalty of sin justification; salvation from the power of sin – sanctification; salvation from the presence of sin – glorification (Tit. 2:11-13; Heb. 9:24, 26, 28; Phil. 3:20, 21; Rom. 8:23), and includes the whole man – spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23).

...That true believers have as a present possession the gift of eternal life (1 Jn. 5:10-12), a perfect righteousness (Rom. 3:22), sonship in the family of God (Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1, 2), every spiritual resource needed for life and godliness (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:3) and deliverance from all condemnation (Jn. 5:24).

...That in view of this completeness in Christ (Col. 2:10) and the abiding, sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16, 17; Tit. 3:5), it is in no way required by God to seek a “second work of grace” (Gal. 3:3).

...That apart from Christ there is no possible salvation (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 13:39).

## **Article VIII**

### **Sanctification**

We believe...That sanctification, which is a setting-apart unto God, is threefold:

That it is already complete for every person because his position toward God is the same as Christ’s position (Heb. 10:10, 14; 1 Cor. 6:11, RV).

...That while the standing of the believer is thus perfect “in Christ”, his present state is as imperfect as his experience in daily life, and there is therefore also a progressive sanctification wherein the believer is to “grow in grace” and to be “changed” by the unhindered power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 7:1; 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:18).

...That, lastly, the child of God will yet be fully sanctified in his state, as he is now sanctified in his standing, when he shall see his Lord and “shall be like Him” (Jn. 3:2; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23).

## **Article IX**

### **Assurance**

We believe...That, because of the eternal purpose of God towards the objects of His love (Eph. 1:4; 2:6, 7) because of His freedom to exercise grace towards the meritless on the ground of the propitiatory Blood of Christ (Rom. 5:8-10; Jn. 10:28), because of the very nature of the divine gift of eternal life (Jn. 5:24; 1 Jn. 5:13), because of the present and unending intercession and advocacy of Christ in heaven (Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1), because of the abiding and sealing presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all who are saved (Jn. 14:16; Eph. 1:13, 14) we, and all true believers everywhere, can have a firm assurance of our salvation (Heb. 6:18, 19).

We believe also, however... that since God is a holy and righteous Father (1 Pet. 1:15, 16), and cannot overlook the sins of His children (Hab. 1:13), He will, when His children persistently sin and fail to judge themselves (1 Cor. 11:31), chasten them and scourge them in infinite love (Heb. 12:6) in order that He may at last present them blameless before the presence of His glory (1 Cor. 11:30, 31; Eph. 5:25, 26; 1 Cor. 5:5).

## **Article X**

### **The Church**

We believe...That the Church is the mystical Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18; Rev. 21:9), which He began on the Day of Pentecost (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47), and will complete at His second coming (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rom. 11:25).

...That all true believers of this dispensation, irrespective of membership in the organized local churches of earth, have been baptized into this Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12, 13; cf. 1:2).

...That the members of this one Body should wherever possible, assemble themselves together into local churches for worship, prayer, fellowship, and teaching (Heb. 10:25; Acts 2:42), and for the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

...That it is the solemn duty of its members to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), rising above sectarian differences (1 Cor. 3:3,4), and loving one another with a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22).

...That the first and foremost mission of the Church in the world today is to witness for Christ among the nations (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mk. 16:15; Acts 1:8).

## **Article XI**

### **The Blessed Hope**

We believe...That the Second Coming of Christ (Heb. 9:28) will take place in two stages, the first being the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17) when He comes as the "Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16), in the air (1 Thess. 4:17) to receive His own (Jn. 14:3) and the second being the Revelation (2 Thess. 1:7,8) when He comes as the "Son of Righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4) to be received by repentant Israel (Zech. 12:10);

...That, according to the Word of God, the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the pre-Tribulation coming of Christ (Rev. 3:10,11) in the air to receive to Himself His own, both those who have fallen asleep and those who are alive and remain unto His coming (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Jn. 11:25, 26);

...That this is the "blessed hope" of the Church (Tit. 2:13), an event for which we should constantly be watching, the time being unrevealed but always imminent (Mk. 13:32-37; Rev. 22:12,20);

...That this event will be followed by the judgment of the believer's works for reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-15) a judgment which may result in the loss of rewards, but not the loss of salvation (1 Cor. 3:11-15) and by the Marriage of the Lamb just before the Lord returns in glory (Rev. 19:7-9).

## **Article XII**

### **Christ's Glorious Appearing**

We believe...That the world will not be converted previous to the Second Coming of Christ, but is day by day ripening for judgment (Lk. 17:26).

...That this dispensation will end with a fearful apostasy in the professing Church (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4; 2 Thess. 2:11, 12) which during the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21), will be headed by a personal Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3, 4; 1 Jn. 2:18).

...That God's righteous judgements will then be poured out upon the world (Rev. 6:1-18:24).

...That at the close of this period (Matt. 24: 29, 30) the Lord Jesus Christ will personally, visibly, and gloriously descend from heaven (Rev. 1:7; 19:11-16) with the Church (Zech. 14:5; Jude 14) and His holy angels (2 Thess. 1:7) to bind Satan in the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3), judge the

living nations (Matt. 25:31-46), restore to Israel her land (Deut. 30:3-5; Ezek. 37:21; Isa. 11:11, 12), establish His glorious and literal kingdom over all nations for a thousand years (Acts 15:16; Rev. 20:4-6), lift the curse which now rests upon the whole creation (Isa. 11:6-9; Rom. 8:19-23), and bring the whole world to the knowledge of the Lord (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14).

...That at the end of the thousand years, Satan shall be loosed for a short season to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:7-9).

...That the unsaved dead shall then be raised, judged according to their works, and cast into the Lake of Fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Rev. 20:11-15; Matt. 25:41).

...That, as the Son of David (Lk. 1:32), Christ will finally deliver up the Messianic Kingdom to God the Father, in order that He, as the Eternal Son, may reign with the Father in the New Heaven and the New Earth eternally (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 21:1).

### **Article XIII**

#### **The Future Life**

We believe...That the spirits of the SAVED at death go immediately to be with Christ in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-23), where they abide in joyful and conscious fellowship with Him until He comes for His own (1 Thess. 4:14), when their bodies shall be raised from the grave and changed into the likeness of His own glorious body (1 Cor. 15:25-58; Phil. 3:20, 21), and in that state forever to enjoy the presence of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17) and to reign with Him on Earth (Rev. 5:10; 20:6) and throughout eternity (Rev. 22:5).

...That the spirits of the UNSAVED at death descend immediately into Hades (Lk. 16:23; Num. 16:33) where they are kept under conscious punishment and misery (2 Pet. 2:9, RV), until the judgment of the Great White Throne after the Millennium (Rev. 20:11), at which time Hades will deliver up its dead (Rev. 20:13) and their bodies shall be raised from the grave (Rev. 20:5); they shall be judged according to their works (Rom. 2:3-6; Rev. 20:12), and be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15; 21:8), not to be annihilated (cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10), nor ultimately restored (Rev. 22:11), but to be punished with final and everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:9).

### **Article XIV**

#### **Angels, Fallen and Unfallen**

We believe...That God created an innumerable company of sinless, spiritual beings, known as angels (Col. 1:16; Heb. 12:22).

...That one, Satan, a personal being of the highest rank (Ezek. 28:12-19) through pride (1 Tim. 3:16) and unlawful ambition (Isa. 14:12-15) rebelled against God and fell, thereby becoming completely depraved in character (Jn. 8:44) and the leader of a large host of evil angels and demons who followed him in his fall (Rev. 12:9; Matt. 12:24, RV; Jude 6).

...That a great company of angels kept their holy estate (Mk. 8:38), and are before the throne of God (Rev. 5:11) from whence they are sent forth as ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:13, 14).

...That Satan was judged at the cross (1 Jn. 3:8) and through subtlety led our first parents into transgression (2 Cor. 11:3), accomplishing their moral fall (Gen. 3:1-7), and, as the “god of this world,” subjecting them and their posterity to his own power (2 Cor. 4:4).

...That Satan was judged at the cross (Jn. 16:11; Col. 2:15), and, although that judgment was not immediately executed, he will ultimately be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” where, together with the fallen angels and all the unsaved, he will be “tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10,15; Jude 6).

## **Article XV**

### **The Christian’s Walk**

We believe...That the believer is called with a holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9) to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4) and so to live in the power of the indwelling Spirit, that he will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-18).

...That as the flesh with its fallen Adamic nature in this life is never eradicated (Rom. 7:23; 1 Jn. 1:8; 1 Ki. 8:46; Phil. 3:12), it needs to be kept by the Spirit in constant subjection to Christ (Rom. 6:11-13; Eph. 4:22-24; 1 Cor. 10:12; 2 Cor. 10:5).

...That good works are in no sense the procuring cause of salvation (Eph. 2:8-10), but are its proper evidence and fruit (1 Jn. 3:9-10; Tit. 2:14; Matt. 7:16-20).

...That since our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20, RV), we as the children of God should live a consistent, separated Christian life (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; Eph. 5:11), and abstain from all worldly amusements and unclean habits which defile mind and body (1 Thess. 5:22; 1 Pet. 2:11; Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20), and from such worldly practices as: the swearing of oaths (James 5:12), affiliation with secret societies (2 Cor. 6:14), using courts from settling disputes between believers (1 Cor. 6:1-8), taking personal vengeance and participating in carnal strife (Rom. 12:17-21; 2 Cor. 10:3, 4), and divorce as forbidden by the Lord (Matt. 19:9; Rom. 13:9).

...That the believer should keep the Word of the Lord (Jn. 14:23), seek those things which are above (Col. 3:1, 2), walk as He walked (1 Jn. 2:6), be careful to maintain good works (Tit. 3:8), and especially accept as a solemn responsibility the duty and privilege of bearing the Gospel (1 Cor. 5:19; Jn. 15:16), remembering that a victorious, fruitful life is possible only to those who in gratitude for the infinite and undeserved mercies of God have presented themselves wholly to Him for His service (Rom. 12:1, 2).

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