SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY AND A PEOPLE APART:

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

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The Mennonite Brethren are an enduring people. They have
endured, not only in rural communities in Russia and the
United States, but in urban centers of contemporary North
America. They have endured, not only as a persecuted reli-
gious minority in the past, but now, in the twentieth
century, as an integral part of the larger Mennonite family.
They have endured not only as a scattered ethnic group, in
forced enclaves on the Russian steppes, but now, as a more
cohesive group living in voluntary enclaves and searching
for knowledge of who they are as an ethnic group.

This endurance, rooted in their history as a distinct
people, has given them a rich ethnic and religious heritage.
Both parts of this heritage need to be understood and
acknowledged. The religious and the ethnic are complemen-
tary, for Mennonite Brethren peoplehood is not just one or
the other—is a synthesis of the two.

Most Mennonite Brethren scholars emphasize the religious
identity of the group; this may be a natural consequence of
the events of 1860, for the initial separation between
Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren was religious, not ethnic.
However, the Mennonite Brethren in 1860 were also

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ethnic. Religious dissension divided the group socially and
the ethnic group was split--each part considering itself a
unique, separated group.

Ethnicity is family, and family includes all people
born into the group. Although family and kinship ties have
always been crucial in Mennonite Brethren life(Peters 1972),
ethnicity hasn't been emphasized until recently. However,
the days of taking it for granted seem to be over. Ethnic
affiliation is being examined; ethnic and religious
affiliation are being compared. This whole process, a pro-
cess of searching for identity, is unsettling. In fact,
Katie Funk Wiebe (1987:17) has used the word "traumatic" in
writing about the search for Mennonite Brethren self-iden-
tity. This uneasiness is understandable; since ethnicity is
family, an analysis of family is also an analysis of self.

This search for identity is disturbing but it need not
be disruptive. The search for identity does imply crisis but
a crisis that can be resolved positively. The resolution of
an identity crisis depends on acquiring knowledge about who
one is and internalizing that knowledge so identity is
achieved in a positive manner (Erikson 1950).

Ethnicity is a social phenomenon, one which needs to be
examined by using social and psychological analysis. Just
as the Bible is used for answers to religious questions, so
social and psychological research needs to be used for
answering questions of ethnicity. It is within this frame-
work I wish to explore the ways ethnicity has persisted in

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Mennonite Brethren life and suggest some psychological reasons for this persistence.[1]

Both Mennonite and non-Mennonite scholars agree that the Mennonite Brethren are a religious ethnic group. Objectively, members of the group share a cultural and religious heritage. Subjectively, there is the sense of belonging to the group; the sense of peoplehood; the development of a consciousness of kind.

ETHNIC AFFILIATION

Ethnic affiliation is ascribed; it is a status determined by birth into a kinship group and thus group membership is involuntary since a person is a member from birth until death. An ethnic group is like an extended family. The Mennonite Brethren acknowledge this for they consider themselves a fraternal brotherhood. Members of the brotherhood are genuinely interested in the welfare of each member and they express this interest by associating with one another. Information is shared—personal information about individuals and information about families in the wider social network. Ethnics are knowledgeable about genealogies, marriage patterns, and the general economic and social status of group members. In addition, there is ethnic humor, ethnic jokes, ethnic "insider" information. All these factors form the basis for ethnic communication, a communication which is noted by its intensity and by the

satisfaction of those who take part in it. As one ethnic MB
said to me:[2]

> I have lived away from other Mennonite
> Brethren but I have come back to stay. I
> belong here. The other Mennonite Brethren
> understand me, they know my background, my
> family and my interests. I've decided that
> for me and my family it is best to live near
> those who have the same life style and
> religious beliefs that I do.

Members of an ethnic group are acknowledged and
accepted, not for their actions, but because of family
connections. This acceptance is unconditional; one's
behavior may be inappropriate at times, but one is still a
member of the group. For example, being a member of a
family does not mean that parents always approve of a
child's conduct; it does mean, however, that a person is
always family and acceptance, if not approval, is present.

Ethnicity is oriented to special past heritage. George
De Vos (1982:19) has noted that "ethnicity is primarily a
sense of belonging to a particular ancestry and origin and
of sharing a specific religion or language." Ethnic groups
have a rich historical heritage--a heritage composed of
experiences the group has encountered in the past.

The historical experiences of the Mennonite Brethren
include (just to mention a few); life in the Russian
colonies, the triumphs and rejection surrounding the 1860
division, the persecution in Russia between 1860-1874, and
finally, their experiences as immigrants to the United
states--the hardships, the economic and religious freedom

and finally the transformation to the economically secure MB group of the 1980s.

This historical heritage includes a concept of peoplehood, that is, people of our kind, As noted above, this is a vital ingredient of ethnic group life in the present. The _ideas_ of peoplehood come from the historical heritage of the group but the _feelings_ of peoplehood are kept alive in the present through continued interaction with other ethnic group members. Peoplehood, by definition, is an exclusionary concept for group members distinguish themselves from other groups. They dichotomize the world into categories of "we" versus "they." This creates both social and psychological distance between groups which is an essential component for the formation of group identity.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

In contradistinction to ethnic affiliation, religious affiliation is an achieved status, a status one attains by a conscious decision to join a group by accepting the norms and values of that group. The founders of the Mennonite Brethren religious movement in 1860 made a clear distinction between ethnic and religious membership. They believed religious membership should be based on a voluntary decision of each individual. The criteria they used for religious membership was derived from the Bible and included: an experiential religious conversion, repentence of sins, baptism and the desire to live a Christian life.

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The Mennonite Brethren have an active mission emphasis; as a result of this emphasis converts join the church, converts who, very often, are not ethnic Mennonite Brethren. Because of this, many MB churches have these two categories of members: ethnic and non-ethnic. Everyone has the same achieved religious membership but the MB ethnics also have an ascribed ethnic affiliation. Even though both groups share religious beliefs and values, there is a clear distinction made, by both groups, between the two categories. Officially, this distinction may not be overtly acknowledged. Unofficially, however, it is noted and the two groups continue. In spite of efforts to minimize ethnicity, it remains.

The leaders of the Mennonite Brethren church view this "double standard" of membership as a problem. Various solutions are suggested to solve the problem. One of the themes in most of these solutions is a stronger emphasis on religion and a weaker emphasis on ethnicity. Solutions have problems too, and one of the problems to these solutions is a hesitancy to analyze ethnicity with the same intensity as is applied to religion. But it does need to be analyzed in an appropriate manner, for if religion and ethnicity are to be compared, they need to be given equal amounts of research effort.

I would suggest that several questions need to be asked: Why is there a difference between ethnic and religious affiliation? Why is ethnicity so persistent despite efforts to minimize or eradicate it?

Comparison between Ethnic and Religious Affiliation

Religious affiliation and ethnic affiliation both provide continuity, but each has a different emphasis. The continuity of the religious group depends on the continuity of a belief system. This is more important than the specific individuals in the group. For example, the membership of the Lakewood Church in Harrison has changed in the last 40 years but the religious message has not changed; and thus, religious continuity is assured. Religious affiliation is, first of all, for the Mennonite Brethren, an individual experience between a person and God. True, it is reaffirmed in the brotherhood of believers, but the validity of the religious experience is personal, not social.

The continuity of the ethnic group, however, is social; it is dependent on the continuity of specific kinship ties. To be ethnic is, by definition, to belong to a social group. Thus, while the past heritage is necessary, the continuity of the ethnic group in the present is maintained by face-to-face contacts between individuals and families. These were the comments of a non-ethnic to me during my fieldwork:

> When I first joined the church, I didn't understand why there was so much kinship dialogue going on after church on Sunday. First I thought it was because of the church emphasis on brotherhood but I soon realized how wrong I was. That wasn't the reason-- the real reason was kin folks. I have decided that is really what the Mennonite Brethren are most interested in. (Warner 1985:154).

This continuity, both ethnic and religious, has assured the persistence of both identities in the present. There is agreement on the reasons for religious persistence but this same agreement does not extend to the ethnic.

THE PERSISTENCE OF ETHNICITY

The persistence of ethnicity is well documented in social science literature. From Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan's work (1970) to the more selective works on "white ethnics" by Michael Novak (1972) and Andrew Greeley (1972)—all these works, while noting changes in life style, have emphasized the persistence of ethnic values and norms.

Mennonite social scientists, such as Leo Driedger (1980), Calvin Redekop (1984), and John Redekop (1987) have documented the persistence of Mennonite ethnicity. John Redekop's book, A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren views this persistence as a "problem" because the term Mennonite has come to have a double meaning, ethnic and religious, and, according to his research, these meanings seem to contradict each other. By this he means, that the current expression of Mennonite Brethren ethnicity is hindering the religious mission of the church. I would suggest that some of these seeming contradictions exist because of two factors. 1) there is confusion in defining the two parts of Mennonite Brethren identity, and 2) there is no exploration of the social and/or psychological reasons for the persistence of ethnicity among the Mennonite

Brethren.

I have already suggested some main differences between ethnic and religious affiliation. Now I wish to explore the social ways ethnicity has persisted and suggest psychological reasons for this phenomenon.

Social Reasons for Ethnic Persistence

The Dutch-North German Mennonites have been a migratory people living at times, a tenuous existence on the margins of Prussian and Russian societies. Persecuted for their religious beliefs and excluded from full participation in the wider society, they lived in an unsafe environment for, at any time, the few privileges they had could be taken away. Because of this social and psychological insecurity, and because of their perceived superiority to their Slavic neighbors, the Mennonites in Russia turned inward, relying on themselves for their social, religious and psychological security. This created what Edward Spicer (1971) has called, an oppositional process--a process clearly defining the boundaries of each group and keeping each group separate. This separation, in turn, strengthened the Mennonite sense of identity as a distinct people.

Following the 1860 division between Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren, the oppositional process changed the boundaries within the Mennonite colonies. Now the boundaries between the two Mennonite groups were just as important, if not more important, than the boundaries between the Mennonites and the surrounding Slavic society.

This oppositional process continued after the Mennonite Brethren migrated to the United States in the 1870s. But here the social environment changes. They were free to live wherever they wished--but they did not wish to do so. The patterns of social separation continued as the majority elected to live in what Cornelius Janzen called "compact communities" in the Mid-West.

Why did the Mennonite Brethren choose to live close to each other? Their cultural patterns, their language, their religion--all these were different, not only from the wider American society, but from other Mennonite groups as well. It made no sense to scatter out across the Mid-Western states--why live alone in the midst of foreigners when you could live with people you personally knew, those who were like yourself. Thus, the establishment of voluntary enclaves.

These living conditions must have been satisfactory for the pattern was duplicated repeatedly as the Mennonite Brethren moved westward to Oklahoma, to rural California and finally to the urban areas of the state. For example, Nachtigall(1972) discovered that 88% of the Mennonites who lived in Fresno and Tulare Counties of California settled there because other Mennonites already lived there.

As rural occupational opportunities dwindled in the 1930s, a few Mennonite Brethren tentatively explored selected urban centers, such as Fresno and Harrison, California. Here again, the pattern of voluntary

enclavement continued, this time in an urban setting. As one

of the MB pioneers in Harrison said to me,

> All the Mennonite Brethren who wanted jobs
> in Harrison contacted me. I found jobs for
> them and, for a while, we lived together--
> this was before our families moved to the
> city. Even after our families came, we
> wanted to live close enough to each other so
> we could keep close contact--after all we
> were not only members of the same church but
> we considered ourselves as one large family.
> Later on, when some Mennonite Brethren from
> Canada moved here, we took them right into
> the group--they were also "family."

So, the first way ethnicity has persisted has been by

the practice of voluntary enclavement. The Mennonite

Brethren made, and continue to make, decisions to live near

each other. They made, and continue to make, conscious

efforts to stay in contact. And so, in this way, social

boundaries are maintained between the Mennonite Brethren and

the wider society. These boundaries are called "outer"

boundaries by sociologists because they control interaction

between "insiders" and "outsiders"(Banks and Gay 1978).

Many groups practice this type of enclavement--Jews,

Mormons, Italians, Hutterites, Amish and all groups of

Mennonites. This is graphically illustrated in the map of

Harrison which hangs in the Lakewood Church offices--the

residence of each member indicated by a pinpoint. Most of

them are concentrated in one general area of the city--

within easy commuting distance to each other and to the

church.

The second method by which ethnicity persists is through

the socialization process, that is, the process of learning

behavior considered appropriate in Mennonite Brethren life. The transmission of cultural and religious values from parents to children is essential if a people is to endure. As Spicer has noted:

> Every people has accumulated experiences which they pass on as tradition from generation to generation. These experiences are associated with specific places, with specific persons, with triumphs and defeats, with sufferings, with friendly alliances, with persecutions and betrayals. These events are known to a given people from the inside as they are told by parents to children and transmitted with the feelings about them that have moved previous generations (Spicer 1980:347).

What does Mennonite Brethren socialization include? To list a few things: ways of thinking, ways of acting, ways of feeling, value systems, the importance of kinship ties, and the differences between "insider" Mennonite Brethren and "outsider" non-Mennonite Brethren.

Just as the practice of voluntary enclavement establishes "outer" boundaries, so the socialization practices of a group establish "inner" boundaries (Isajiw 1974). These inner boundaries define Mennonite Brethren values, clarify what behavior is acceptable and instill intellectual and emotional guidelines which preserve the integrity of Mennonite Brethren life. Two examples from my fieldwork point out both types of boundaries:

> A student at an MB college said to me: My parents insisted I attend here because I would learn to know other MB young people and I would learn in a Christian environment. Initially I wanted to go to another college, but their decision was correct.

I was talking to an MB teenager and I
mentioned an activity at a non-MB church. I
asked her if she associated with them. Her
reply was: "No, that church is too liberal.
My parents don't want me to associate with
the young people because I would be exposed
to sinful influences." I asked if she agreed
with her parents and she said, "Yes I do
now, I didn't at first. But you know, those
kids really are kind of strange--the way
they talk and dress. I like the Mennonite
Brethren young people better.

Socialization is effective if Mennonite Brethren values
and acceptable conduct are transmitted successfully to the
younger generation. The outer social boundaries between the
groups remain intact as the above examples illustrate. Even
though there are secondary contacts with the "outside," the
"inner" group, Mennonite Brethren, is the preferred group
for social contacts and discourse. Thus, the outer
boundaries remain firm because the inner boundaries--values
etc--are internalized by the younger generation. Using
Irving Rosow's term (1965), such an individual is
"completely socialized"--that is, he has internalized the
group's values for he accepts them and acts according to
them.

The third reason for the persistence of Mennonite
Brethren ethnicity was the early and continued establishment
of church-sponsored educational institutions, such as
schools, high schools and colleges. As noted above, the
Mennonite Brethren settlements in the United States had no
boundaries imposed upon them externally, and thus the
oppositional process was totally controlled by the Mennonite
Brethren. However, the absence of external opposition, is a

critical factor. Castille (1981:xix) comments that where external opposition is minimized or altogether absent, members of a group may be absorbed into the wider society because there is no clear distinction between "us" and "them". In such situations, the inner boundaries (socialization) are not kept firm and this, in turn, weakens the outer boundaries. It was this weakening of outer boundaries and the loss of Mennonite Brethren identity that church leaders feared in the nineteenth century and still fear today--thus the initial establishment of church-sponsored institutions and their perpetuation in present-day society.

Psychological Reasons for Ethnic Persistence

Since Mennonite Brethren ethnicity has persisted, one has to assume there are psychological reasons for this persistence. People don't keep an affiliation which has no meaning for them and which fulfills no function in their lives.

The first psychological reason for the persistence of ethnicity is that it provides a framework for the social and psychological placement of individuals. Group members feel comfortable if they can place a person either inside or outside the group. The following examples illustrate this principle in ethnic life. First, the placement of an "unknown" insider.

I was attending a committee meeting at the
Lakewood Church. When prayer needs were

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requested, prayer was asked for a sick man
in the Central Valley. A committee member,
who was originally from the Mid-West, asked
the identity of the sick man. The
explanation took 5-7 minutes to complete
because in the process, other kinship
relationships were also explored. When
exeryone understood the identity of the
individual in the broader kinship network,
everyone was satisfied and prayer could
begin.

Another example from my fieldwork--the placement of an

"outsider" or rather the non-placement of an outsider.

While I was conducting fieldwork in the
Lakewood Church, I diligently attended
religious meetings, some committee meetings
and all kinds of social functions. The more
I attended, the more uneasy some people
became. They were uncomfortable primarily
because they couldn't place me in a neat
category, in their frame of reference. I was
an outsider, yet I was a Mennonite. I was
participating in activities, yet I was not a
member. Several individuals mentioned this
discomfort and said they wished I would join
the church.

Another brief example: John Redekop, in his book, A

People Apart carefully places two social scientists who have

done fieldwork among the Mennonites. He notes that E.K.

Francis is the "outside" sociologist; I am the

anthropologist "from (Old) Mennonite background."

This preoccupation with placement is not just Mennonite

Brethren, or Mennonite--it is a characteristic of all ethnic

groups. It is an outward manifestation of what sociologists

call "social distance." This refers not to lineal distance

but to the subjective sense of nearness felt to other

individuals. Tamotsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan (1965)

characterize an ethnic group as having a low degree of

social distance. When this distance is low, people know

each other well, they share experiences, they sympathize with each other. Because of this closeness, they relax and are less defensive--after all, a person belongs, a person feels at home.

However, when social distance is high, that is, between members of two ethnic groups, the outsider is seen as a representative of a different category. An outsider is, by definition, an unknown, a person presumed to have different values, a person not a part of one's group. In such situations, spontaneous communication is lacking, people are more defensive and less relaxed because the outsider does not belong to the group.

A second psychological reason for the persistence of ethnicity is a lingering ambivalence toward urban life. Historically, the Mennonite Brethren enclaved, and they enclaved on the concept of a rural society. However, in twentieth century America, society is no longer rural, the bases for occupational competence have changed, and professional occupations often require people to live in cities--yet there is a persistence of a modified rural ethos. Many of the United States Mennonite Brethren were raised in rural environments, and the pull of the countryside is still strong. One individual, after returning from a visit to relatives in a rural area, said to me,

> That's where I would really like to live.
> Life in the country is so peaceful, so
> uncomplicated that I wish I could live there
> again.

Admittedly, this person has idealized the rural

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environment but that is not the point. The point is that many Mennonite Brethren do not wholeheartedly embrace urban life. They lack occupational confidence and even though they do assume urban roles, it is with ambivalence. One long-time urban MB resident said to me, "These MBs may physically live here in the city, but they still act as they would in the countryside."

Why this ambivalence regarding the city? It is due to a combination of factors: the rural historical legacy of the group, the successful socialization practices of the family and church, and thirdly, perhaps even some fear of urban life. A conversation I had with a Mennonite graduate student at U.C. Berkeley illustrates this latter point:

> I asked this student the following question, "Before you moved here, did you first check whether there were other Mennonites in the area?" She looked at me with a shocked expression on her face, and said, "Of course, I did. I would have been afraid to come here if I hadn't." Her fear continued throughout her five years at Berkeley--her strongest ties were not with graduate students but with Mennonites who were not students at U.C.

A third psychological reason for the persistence of ethnicity could be called a crisis of confidence. This subject has been discussed briefly by Wally Kroeker (1985) and in more detail by Paul Toews (1984). The roots of this crisis are not in the present but are found in the historical record of the Mennonite Brethren. Let me summarize that history using a psychological perspective.

The Mennonites who joined the Mennonnite Brethren in

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1860 suffered persecution, ostracism, excommunication and sometimes expulsion from the wider Mennonite society (Friesen 1978; Bekker 1973). All these were rejection, rejection which affected them deeply because it was from family. The Mennonite Brethren internalized this rejection and developed mistrust toward other groups.

Migration to the United States promised religious and economic freedom, but the feeling of mistrust toward "outsiders" and the fear of rejection did not diminish. Other Mennonite groups were outsiders and the Mennonite Brethren preferred not to associate with them, but instead with non-Mennonite denominations. These were outsiders too, but they had not rejected the Mennonite Brethren as the Mennonites had done. The Mennonite Brethren achieved economic success but, at the same time, Hiebert (1977) suggests they felt culturally inferior to their American neighbors. Other Americans were, at times, ambivalent toward the Mennonite Brethren because of their cliqueness and their different style of life. These attitudes would have been disregarded if the MB had felt secure in their identity but since they were not, their psychological vulnerability increased as mistrust was further verified by these ambivalent responses from the wider society.

Lack of self-confidence results from such experiences and people try to avoid situations in which rejection might be repeated. So the Mennonite Brethren lived voluntarily with others "of their kind,"--avoiding sustained interactions with outsiders. These living patterns were ideal for the

perpetuation of ethnicity; they were also ideal for the
perpetuation of psychological insecurity. The less they
associated with the wider society, the more fearful the
possibility became. This lack of intimate interaction with
non-Mennonite Brethren prevented individuals from comparing
themselves favorably with people in the wider society. This
lack of self-confidence has been exacerbated in the present
by the presumed conflict between rural identity and urban
living.

The fact that the Mennonite Brethren have an ethnic
identity or the fact that they call themselves "Mennonite
Brethren"--these are not problems. The problem is the lack
of self-confidence and as I have noted, this is no one's
fault. Rather, the history of group rejection coupled with
the socialization emphases on humility, on self-abasement,
on the sinfulness of pride--all these have caused this lack
of self-confidence, the lack of pride in the group and an
inability to feel they can compete, on an equal basis, with
the non-Mennonite society.

With the advent of a church missionary program in the
urban areas, this lack of self-confidence necessarily enters
into the present discussion. Psychologically, two things
seem to happen because the Mennonite Brethren lack self-
confidence: 1) they try to hide their ethnicity, or 2) they
over-emphasize ethnicity without being aware they are doing
so. In both situations, the boundaries between "insiders"
and "outsiders" continue because, as I noted previously, the

outer boundaries remain intact so long as the inner boundaries of the group, created by the socialization practices, remain consistent.

The attempt to hide ethnicity is illustrated in Redekop's study. He notes the large number of churches who have taken the words "Mennonite Brethren" out of their name. Also, the sign at the Lakewood Church in Harrison indicated a similar thing. The sign in front of the church had the words, "Lakewood Church" in large letters. Lower on the sign in smaller letters, were the words, "Mennonite Brethren." Such decisions are sometimes made because it is feared the words "Mennonite Brethren" will turn people away. As one of the Lakewood Church members replied when I asked about the sign:

> We want newcomers to the church to see us, not as a Mennonite Brethren church, but as a Christian church. No one knows who the Mennonite Brethren are and they might not come if they knew who we were.

Secondly, the over-emphasis of ethnicity. It is a human characteristic that people tend to over-emphasize parts of their identity they feel insecure about. This is largely an unconscious act. People are seeking affirmation from others, affirmation they need from external sources because they are not confident of who they are and if who they are is all right. So there is an need to emphasize the ethnic, and be with other ethnics, not because they want to exclude other people, but because of the need for psychological security.

What is the opposite of the lack of self-confidence? Pride? No, It is not pride. Instead, self-confidence is a

quiet, secure sense of who one is. The sense of self or
group confidence is predicated on finding out who one is and
accepting that identity. Self-confidence means a group likes
who they are--they like their culture, they like the values
of the group, they like the structure of the group
(voluntary enclaves) and they like their name. This kind
of self-confidence acts as a magnet, attracting people, for
people are attracted to a group with confidence in their
identity. This draws people because they want to know and
find out what it is that makes that group so self-assured.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic identity among the Mennonite Brethren has persisted so far in their history and the questioning of such an identity is natural. Adolescents search for who they are, adults doubt their identity at times, and ethnic groups, as families of individuals, go through similar periods of soul-searching. Part of this process is questioning the relevance of past group experiences, part is questioning the validity of present-day life as part of an ethnic group.

The Mennonite Brethren are fortunate to have a rich historical heritage, recent enough that historical records are extant, that individuals can still remember the stories grandparents told them about life in Russia and the early days of settlement in the United States. The establishment of historical archives and the production of films like And When They Shall Ask--all these are ways of keeping this heritage alive and vibrant, a heritage the Mennonite Brethren can be proud of.

In addition, the Mennonite Brethren in the present may not realize it, but the wider society not only respects them, but admires them. They see the Mennonite Brethren as people who have the advantage of knowing their past. They respect and admire the sincere way the Mennonite Brethren express their values such as integrity, honesty, responsibility, tenacity, hard work and above, all, the strength to stand up for what they believe.

Mennonite Brethren ethnicity in the 1980s is alive even though people are not sure what they want to do with it. I would suggest nothing needs to be done to it except to reaffirm it in a positive way. You don't have to give up the old identity of who you are in order to bring more people into the church. If one is less defensive, and more confident about who one is, one can continue to be who one was, bring in new people and still be known as Mennonite Brethren. A change of name or a deletion of name is not necessary. We all like who we are for a name is not just a name but an emblematic symbol linking the past with the present.

The questioning of ethnic identity is healthy. The process of challenging prior assumptions is unsettling at times. The end result, however, will be positive for with a secure identity, the Mennonite Brethren can securely acknowledge their many strengths and use these strengths to further their destiny as an religious ethnic group in a multi-cultural society.

FOOTNOTES

1. The anthropological fieldwork for this research was part of my dissertation research in Harrison, California between 1983-1985. The research method I used was primarily that of participant observation.

2. I provided pseudonyms for both the church and the city were I conducted my research. The city was named Harrison and the Church was the Lakewood Church.

    The examples used in my writing are often syntheses of several conversations. This was done to protect the anonymity of my informants. No one knew their identity except myself.

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