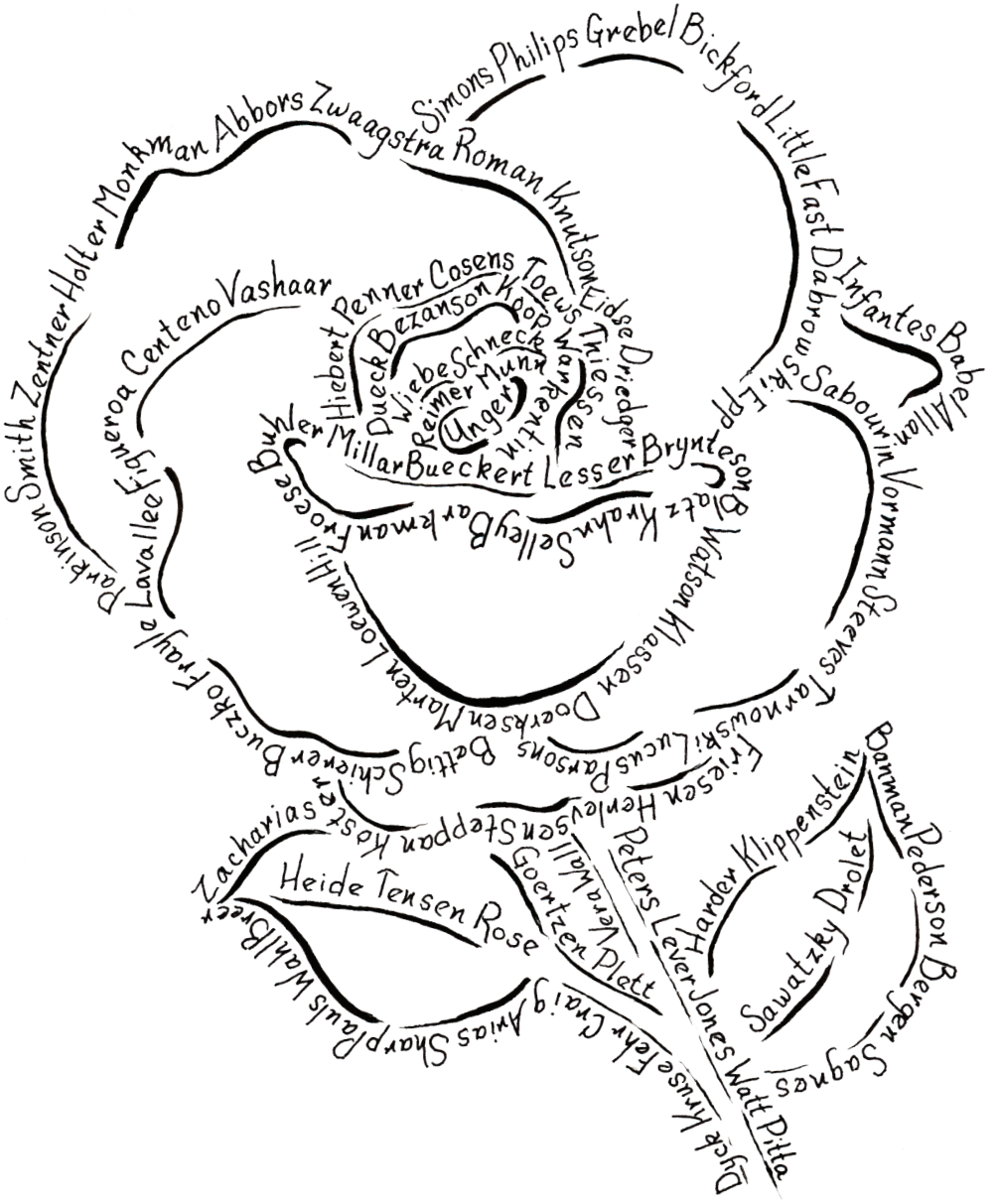

What's in a Name?

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Evangelical Mennonite Conference

What's in a Name?

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The Sunday School/small group lessons prepared for the EMC Bicentennial reflect the conference's spiritual and historical roots, an explanation of the present and aspirations for the future. The title of this series, *What's in a Name?* suggests that at one time or the other we have been associated with a name that we or other people have coined to describe us.

The first four lessons bear titles that were not necessarily considered terms of endearment, but names given to people who dared to follow the teaching and example of their Saviour, Jesus Christ. The last two studies are on names that some conference churches have adopted, others not. This is an opportunity to think about who we are and how we wish to portray ourselves to the world we live in.

We thank the six contributors for their willingness to research and give of their time to prepare the lessons.

The Bicentennial Committee

What's in a Name?

Christian

Arley Loewen

Introduction

When we lived in Toronto in the 1990s, I taught English for new Canadians. After we had discussed Christmas, a Chinese woman asked me, "So are you a Christian?" I replied in the positive. An Iranian from an Assyrian Orthodox tradition interrupted, "I'm a Christian too." She looked at him and said, "You? No, I don't believe it." How would she know? Moreover, what right does she have as a non-Christian to decide whether or not someone is a Christian? The man's comments in class did not match what she expected of Christians.

So, who was right? The "Christian" or the "non-Christian"? In some countries, every person has to declare their religion on their identity cards. So, for example, in Iran or Pakistan, a person is a Muslim, Christian, Hindu or Jew; being a Christian is a matter of legal identity. In this regard, the Assyrian was right; legally, he was a Christian.

Just recently, I visited someone from a Muslim background who had become a Christian. Some of his Muslim friends were surprised that he "as a Christian" talked about God. He said, "In our society, we think of Christians as people who don't talk about God." Although this definition of Christian seems outlandish to us, it illustrates how perception and understanding of the term *Christian* are so diverse.

Who is a Christian?

So, who is a Christian? What is a Christian? What defines a person as a Christian?

- A person whose ID or passport says they are a Christian
- A person who is baptized
- A person who is baptized after the age of accountability
- A person who is a member of a church (regardless of denomination)
- A person who is "born again"
- A person who is born into a Christian home, i.e., their parents are Christians.
- A person who believes in the historical statements of faith such as the Apostles' Creed and/or the Nicene Creed
- A person who follows Jesus
- A person who confesses that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised Him from the dead
- A person who wears a cross around their neck
- A person who attends church regularly
- A person who verbally professes faith in Christ
- A person who believes in Jesus Christ

Each one of these definitions of *Christian* leads to further questions. Is the term defined by doctrine, i.e., by what a person believes? Or is it by behaviour, by how people conduct themselves? Or is it by baptism, i.e., having gone through a specific ritual? Or should it be defined by experience, i.e., a person who is transformed through a 'new birth' encounter?

It seems the more we try to define the word *Christian* the more confusing it becomes. The term carries both negative and positive connotations in our present world. How can we explain the term satisfactorily?[1]

During Jesus' Life

Obviously, the word *Christian* is connected to Christ (Greek word for Messiah). Prior to and after Jesus' life, many Jewish figures claimed to be

christ (messiah). They spoke of revolution and sought to restore Israel. People who heard Jesus' teaching and experienced His miracles began to follow Him. They "believed in Him" that He would restore Israel to its former greatness. However, many left this new movement when they saw His way was not what they had expected. Even the closest disciples left Him when He was arrested. To their dismay, this Messiah was crucified and buried.

Up to this point, no one was ever called a Christian. In other words, the twelve disciples were not Christians in a literal sense.

After Jesus' Ascension

Then Jesus rose from the dead. The shocked disciples now believed in Him in a more profound way. After Jesus ascended to heaven, they began to call each other "brothers" (Acts 1:16).[2] Luke describes all those who repented and believed that Jesus was Lord and the Messiah as "believers" (Acts 2:44). The statement of faith is very basic. They simply repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. We don't know what exactly they repented of, but their lives radically changed. They fellowshipped with each other, prayed together and learned about the Messiah. They shared their lives with each other, visited each other in their homes and had meals together. They sensed they were part of a new world, a new kingdom that centred on Jesus, who they believed was alive and whom they called "Lord."

Throughout the book of Acts these people were simply called "believers" (28 times) or "disciples" (24 times), "those who belonged to the way" or who "followed the way" (six times) or "saints" [holy people] (three times), which is the most common term in the epistles as well.

The First Christians

It never dawned on the first "believers" to give themselves a special name. They were not into marketing or labelling; they simply devoted themselves to being part of this new world. The word "Christian" is used only twice in Acts, and both times by those who were not part of this movement.

Acts 11:26: "For a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."

This new movement had been growing among the Jews and was primarily seen as an offshoot or a sect of Judaism. Approximately 15 years after that first day when around three thousand Jews had declared their allegiance to this Messiah, a change happened in a city 300 miles north of Jerusalem (150 miles north of present-day Beirut, Lebanon). Here in Antioch, for the first time, the message of Jesus as Lord and Messiah spread outside the Jewish culture in a significant manner. Many Greeks (considered foreigners to Jews) identified themselves with this Jewish Messiah. No longer merely a sect of Judaism, but a new community of faith developed that included people from other races. Those who believed the good news of the Lord Jesus were called *christ-ianos* (Christians) for the first time. The word is comprised of two words, *Christ* and a suffix *ianos*, meaning to belong to Christ.[3]

Paul, a Christian

The term must have become common as the movement spread into Asia Minor. About 15 years later, upon Paul's return to Jerusalem, he was arrested by the Roman authorities because of threats from the Jewish religious leaders. When Paul presented his case in at the court of Festus the Roman governor for Judea, Festus considered the case between Paul and the Jews as simply a "dispute about their own religion." Later Paul gave his testimony to King Agrippa. Rooting himself in the Jewish tradition, Paul openly declared how he had met the living Jesus who called him to spread the message of forgiveness to all races. Agrippa must have assumed that Paul was known as a Christian for he says to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul responded positively, "Yes …" (Acts 26:29). Yet, Paul never calls himself a Christian. He wrote thirteen letters to churches and individuals in Asia Minor, but not once does he use the term *Christian*. I wonder why.

Suffering as a Christian

Peter, however, used the term once in his first letter. He addressed believers as "God's elect," "strangers," and "chosen ones" who were scattered throughout Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). These people had experienced a new birth and their lives were radically changed. Peter called them "living stones" and said they were "a spiritual house … chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God …" (1 Peter 2:4, 9). But they were facing fierce opposition from Rome by this time, and so Peter encouraged and challenged them, "if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:16). A Christian was one who bore the name of Christ[4] but, more than that, Christians were God's people, the new temple, the fulfilled or real Israel.

These people faced much opposition. The social pressure to pledge allegiance to the Roman Emperor grew increasingly intense. The Roman emperor was considered to be lord (*kupios*) and demanded total allegiance from all Romans. However, the growing number of people who pledged allegiance to Christ refused to identify themselves with Caesar.

As the number of Christians spread throughout the empire, their devotion to one another and to anyone in need became a distinguishing characteristic of Christians. The theologian Tertullian (ca. AD 160–220), wrote in defence of the faith, "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they [pagans] say, 'look how they love one another!'" (Apology, 39, 1989, quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 87).

When epidemics struck Roman cities during the first centuries, pagans refused to help others in need; rather they fled endangered areas. Christians stayed behind to care for their own and others. Christians were defined by their love, by their sacrifice for the sake of others.

Christian and Christendom

Much of this changed in the fourth century. The Roman general Constantine converted to the Christian faith and became emperor of Roman Empire. He soon issued an edict proclaiming freedom for all religions

and special protection for churches and Christians. Church fathers were elated. Christians were free to worship and practice their faith. Twelve years after Constantine's conversion, he chaired the Council of Nicea where church fathers ironed out a full-orbed theology of the nature of Christ, declaring that Christ is both human and divine. The Nicene Creed has become a foundational statement of faith for Christians around the world. We confess this faith today. A Christian was defined by right doctrine, by confessing the accepted creed.

In less than 250 years, Christians—that small movement of people who were radically changed as they pledged their allegiance to Christ as Lord—now enjoyed privileged status with Rome. The first two Greek letters for Christ *[Xp]* became the standard symbol in the Roman government and military. Christ and Christians became associated with power, the sword and territory. This new relationship between Christians and Roman rule developed into what is called Christendom—a domain ruled by Christians which then needs to be defended.

Several hundred years later, Christians with sword in one hand and a shield with the sign of the cross in the other, invaded the Holy Land, and slaughtered Jew and Muslim alike in order to restore lost territory to Christendom. The definition of *Christian* completely changed. A Christian was someone who belonged to and fought for the Holy Roman Empire.

The empire fell. However, Christians, Christianity and Christendom lived on through the Danes, Portuguese, British and many other Europeans who colonized much of the world.

1. Were these Christian warriors really Christian?

Beyond political and military exploits, much of modern western culture—art, literature, law and music—has its roots in Christendom and the Christian experience of faith.

Christians Today

Nearly 2,000 years have passed since the first believers in Antioch were called Christians. David Barrett, editor of *World Christian Encyclopaedia*

says about 32 per cent of the world's population is Christian, more than two billion in number.

A stricter definition of *Christian* reduces that statistic considerably. The percentage of Christians in America varies from 0.1 to 75 per cent of the population, depending on the definition of *Christian*.[5] So who is a Christian today?

What about you and me today? If I say "I am a Christian" what does this mean to the non-Christian world? What does it mean to a Muslim in Bangladesh or for an agnostic journalist in New York or a Hindu in Nepal? Should we allow the perspective of non-Christians to define *Christian* for us? Surely, we have a right to explain what this word means. However, why do we constantly need to apologize for other Christians and what they have done, or are doing today?

We are in a conundrum with the word *Christian*. We like the word because it identifies us with the first believers who pledged their allegiance to Christ as Lord and who were called the people of God in 1 Peter. We also appreciate the growth of the Christian faith around the world and the influence for good and righteousness that Christians have had worldwide. We belong to that huge hall of faith of Christians. But we are deeply disturbed to be identified with Christians who kill Muslims, with Christians who exploit the poor, with Christians who are tainted in one way or another. Yet, we realize that all of us are tainted. Is it better to redefine this tainted word or use another word to identify us?

2. If we don't appreciate the broader definition of Christians which says there are two billion Christians around the world, why do so many still "cheer for" Christendom? For example, many Christians naturally seem to get more disturbed when Muslims kill Christians than when Christians kill Muslims.

3. If a Muslim or a Hindu would ask you about your religion, what would you tell them? (Comment: Muslims enjoy talking about religion, so there's nothing to fear when they ask us about our faith.)

1 Writers have sought to summarize the essence of being a Christian. To name a few, *Mere Christianity* (C.S. Lewis), *Basic Christianity* (John Stott), *Simply Christian* (N.T. Wright), *The Naked Christian* (Craig Borlase). Many who live among Muslims have found the simple book, *Beliefs and Practices of Christianity* (William Miller), to be very helpful.

2 It appears that the term "brothers" was a generic term used by Jews. Peter addresses the crowd in Acts 2 as "brothers" (Acts 2:29) and the crowd addresses the apostles as "brothers" (Acts 2:37).

3 The word *Christ-iano*s has been variously translated as one who adheres to Christ, one who belongs to Christ, one who is identified with Christ, one who is a part of Christ, one who is related to Christ, one who is like Christ, one who is a little Christ. More doubtful is the translation, one who is a slave in the household of Christ (so, *Herod-ianos* would mean a slave in the household of Herod). Wuest translates the word *Christ-ianos* as a worshipper of Christ in contrast to *Kaisar-ianos* (worshippers of Caesar) (*Wuest Word Studies From the Greek NT*, Vol 2, 121–122). It is doubtful that Caesar-worship was in practice at this time. It was only in the Domitian period (AD 81–96) that the Roman Emperor demanded citizens to worship him as "Our Lord and God."

4 Josephus (d. 100 AD), the most famous and influential Jewish historian of this time, called these people, "the tribe of christians, so named from [Christ}. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3.

5 Religious Tolerance, http://www.religioustolerance.org/worldrel.htm (accessed September 16, 2011).

What's in a Name?

Anabaptist

Cameron McKenzie

This lesson introduces the name *Anabaptist*. It briefly outlines the origin, spread and beliefs of the people who were called by this name.

1. What does the word *Anabaptist* mean to you?

2. Would this be a suitable name for an EMC church letterhead?

On a January evening in 1525 a small group of Christians met in a private house in Zürich, Switzerland. They had come together to talk and pray and discuss the changes that were going on in the church. All of them had a connection with the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli had already been taking many steps to reform the Swiss Church, but these particular men who gathered were troubled by his apparent unwillingness to take the final step and follow through on the teachings of the Bible on a number of issues they felt were important to the very identity of the church. The most significant of these issues was the baptism of believers rather than infants.

One of the stories told about this gathering relates how after a time of soul-searching prayer, one of the men, George Blaurock, stood up and said to Conrad Grebel, another one of the men at this meeting: "For God's sake baptize me with a true Christian baptism upon my faith and knowledge!" After Grebel had baptized Blaurock, Blaurock

in turn baptized the other members of the little group. This meeting was the beginning of what became known as the Anabaptist reformation, a form of Christianity that had at its heart a profound concern to separate the church from the power and influence of the state. Over time this movement developed into a collection of groups in various parts of Europe. They had different points of origin, they had different theological and spiritual emphases, but for all of their differences, they also had a great deal in common.

Switzerland

In Switzerland the early Anabaptists were led by George Blaurock and Conrad Grebel. Other leaders in this movement included Felix Manx, Michael Sattler and one of the most prominent theologians of the early Anabaptists, Balthasar Hubmaier. Under the leadership of these men, as people experienced a deep sense of repentance, revival broke out among the churchgoers of Switzerland. The movement spread quickly, but mostly in secret and in the context of a great deal of persecution. The leaders traveled widely preaching, baptizing and establishing new congregations and soon a robust community of Anabaptist congregations was present in Switzerland.

Austria and Germany

At the same time in Austria and Germany, other groups of Christians who shared the same theological ideas as the Anabaptists in Switzerland began to emerge in the context of the Protestant Reformation. Under the leadership of people like Pilgrim Marpeck and Hans Hut, thousands were converted to the Anabaptist movement. Also among the leaders of the German Anabaptists was Hans Denck, sometimes known as the "apostle of love" because of his attempts to bridge the gaps between the various church groups emerging in Germany during the Reformation.

The Netherlands

The Anabaptist movement also took root in the Netherlands. Melchior Hoffman, a German with some Anabaptist connections, made the initial contact. In the end, however, his somewhat heretical theology about

the nature of the incarnation (Jesus' flesh did not come from Mary), along with his obsession with biblical prophecy and apocalyptic texts diminished his influence.

3. What is your understanding of the nature of the incarnation?

One of his Dutch converts, Jan Matthys, led a group of Anabaptists to take control of the town council in the German town of Muenster. Through force and violence they tried to transform the town into a model of Christian governance. Using Old Testament law as their model, they introduced a range of reforms including polygamy and capital punishment for minor violations of the law. The town was eventually retaken by a German army under the command of the local Roman Catholic bishop and most of the citizens of the town were massacred. One of the main results of this episode was that the Church and government of the day used it to justify the persecution of Anabaptists as dangerous subversives.

Anabaptism in the Netherlands might never have survived were it not for the leadership of a Roman Catholic priest by the name of Menno Simons who converted to the Anabaptist way of thinking. Along with Dirk Phillips, Simons provided careful and wise leadership to the fledgling movement that would eventually come to be known by his name—Mennonites.

Moravia

Finally, in the regions of Moravia, another group of Anabaptists, this time with a radical view of community and shared property began to take root and grow. One of their early leaders, Jacob Hutter, gave his name to this movement. The Hutterites have practiced their communal form of Anabaptism for 450 or so years.

This period of rapid growth lasted from 1525 until about 1540. Thousands joined the movement throughout central Europe and missionary activity spread to Eastern Europe, Italy, and even England. By this time increasing persecution was devastating the tiny congregations, which met in forests and secluded houses. Particularly severe treatment was

reserved for the leaders of the movement and its congregations. It was a rare Anabaptist leader who lived to old age. Of the principal founders only Marpeck, Simons and Philips survived to the middle of the 16th century. Why was so-called Christian Europe so hostile to the Anabaptists? What led to this unusual agreement and such hostility towards the Anabaptists?

There were many different reasons, but what really threatened Catholics and Protestants alike was the Anabaptist determina-tion to keep the church and state separate, and their conviction that Europe as a Christian civilization was a complete fiction.

4. How should we respond to people today who are persecuted for their beliefs?

The Continuing Story

Over the next four centuries the Anabaptist movement continued to experience sporadic persecution, migrations and resettlement. From North Germany and Holland they moved east into Poland, Moravia, Russia and Ukraine, and, finally in the 19th and early 20th centuries, across the Atlantic Ocean to Canada and the USA.

Earlier migrations from Switzerland and Austria/South Germany brought Anabaptists to the new American colonies. Of course, there were Anabaptists who stayed in Europe, mostly in the more tolerant Netherlands.

Among the Anabaptists today are Mennonites, Amish, Brethren in Christ and Hutterites. There is also a strong argument to be made for the influence of the Anabaptist reformation on English Baptists.

What Did and Do Anabaptists Believe?

It is not easy to define Anabaptist doctrine. This is due in part to the fact that the Anabaptists never had a single central leader such as Luther or Calvin. Instead, the Anabaptist movement was much more fluid and changeable. There are a variety of factors that influenced it and caused it to develop. This resulted in all kinds of variations and differences, some of which were quite significant. It is possible, however, to identify

several core beliefs that all of the Anabaptists seem to have shared in common.

The Bible

The first of these relates to the Bible. Like all of the reformers of the 15th and 16th centuries, the Anabaptists believed that the Bible was ultimately authoritative. They disagreed, however, with the other reformers about the Bible's interpretation and application. For example, the Anabaptists focused on the New Testament. More particularly the Anabaptists focused on the life and the teachings of Jesus. It was the life of Jesus, it was the words of Jesus, that provided the key for understanding what the rest of the Scriptures meant. One of the early influential thinkers of the Anabaptist movement, Balthasar Hubmaier went so far as to declare that all of the Scriptures when read properly point us directly to the example of the teaching and spirit of Christ.

The remainder of the list of Anabaptist distinctives included in this lesson all flow from this Christ-centred way of reading the Bible.

Salvation

Luther, Calvin and Zwingli emphasized justification by faith and the forgiveness of past sins. The Anabaptists emphasized new birth and the power to live a new life. A statement by Hans Denck summed up their understanding of salvation, faith and works: "No one can truly know Christ unless he follows him in life, and no one may follow him unless he has first known him." Because of their stress on repentance and the importance of discipleship, other leaders of the Reformation accused the Anabaptists of returning to salvation by works. The Anabaptists, on the other hand, accused their fellow reformers of failing to address moral issues and tolerating unchristian behavior in their churches. Michael Sattler, who penned the Schleitheim Confession—an early statement of Anabaptist principles—argued that while the Catholics appeared to be promoting works without faith, the Reformers were teaching faith without works. He, like all Anabaptists, wanted an authentic faith that expressed itself in action.

The Church

Nowhere is the distinctive teaching of the Anabaptists more noticeable than in their understanding of the Church. The Anabaptists were committed to forming churches of confessing disciples rather than accepting the traditional system where everyone born in a certain town or county and baptized as an infant was regarded automatically as a church member. They insisted on drawing a very clear line between believers and unbelievers, so that church membership was voluntary and meaningful. They came to this understanding of the Church by reading the New Testament and taking seriously what found in the descriptions of the early Church in the Book of Acts.

Perhaps the most visible sign of this renewed understanding of the Church was the Anabaptist conviction that baptism could only be undertaken by someone who had professed faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism was the act by which the believer publicly declared their wish to be identified with Christ and his Church rather than the world. For the majority of people joining the Anabaptists this meant rejecting the effectiveness of the baptism that they had received as infants and being baptized again – although they did not see it as rebaptizing, but rather a first, biblically faithful baptism. It became, in fact, an act of treason against the state and its Church. The people in the movement came to be known as rebaptizers or Anabaptists. And they were ruthlessly hunted down and persecuted for their obedience to the scriptures.

Likewise, they acknowledged the role of the state in government but they rejected state control of the Church. In fact, they rejected all coercion in matters of faith. They rejected hierarchical leadership and exercised their own church discipline that was separate from the actions of the civil courts.

Witness and Evangelism

The Anabaptists were noteworthy for their spontaneous and enthusiastic missionary enterprise in Europe. They travelled widely, often due to persecution, and never missed an opportunity to preach, baptize converts, or plant churches. Again, this rash practice of evangelism, which ignored the structures of the state Church and its parish boundar-

ies, carried out as it was by untrained men and women also outraged their detractors.

Godly Living

One matter even the critics of the Anabaptists agreed upon was that the Anabaptists lived exemplary lives. One contemporary description puts it like this: "As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display, is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God!" (Franz Agricola, 1582).

Non-violence

Anabaptists accepted that the state must use force to govern, but they believed that this was wrong for Christians. Many Anabaptists taught that Christians had no place in the affairs of government. Felix Manz wrote that: "No Christian could be a magistrate, nor could he use the sword to punish or kill anyone."

One of the most famous statements of the early Anabaptists was the one made by Michael Sattler at his trial: "If the Turks should come, we ought not to resist them. For it is written (Matt. 5:21): Thou shalt not kill. We must not defend ourselves against the Turks and others of our persecutors, but are to beseech God with earnest prayer to repel and resist them. If warring were right, I would rather take the field against so-called Christians who persecute, capture and kill pious Christians than against the Turks." Given that the Turkish armies were threatening the very security of Christian Europe, these words sounded like high treason.

The Oath

The swearing of oaths to guarantee the truthfulness of a witness in business and legal transactions is almost as old as human history itself. In the 16th century they were also used to exact loyalty from citizens to the state. Anabaptists usually refused to take such oaths, on the basis of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 that a disciple does not need an oath to

guarantee truth telling, and on the assumption that a Christian would always tell the truth—and not just when under oath. The Anabaptists were also unwilling to swear loyalty to any authority other than God.

5. What is the EMC position on swearing of the oath?

Suffering

Anabaptists were not surprised by the outbreak of persecution. They saw such suffering for the sake of obedience to Christ as both unavoidable and biblical: suffering was a mark of the true church, as Jesus had made clear in both his teaching and his life. If the established state churches resorted to persecuting them, this was a clear sign that they were not the true biblical church. The Anabaptist movement was steeped in blood and suffering in most parts of Europe, but their courageous witness in the face of martyrdom also attracted many people to their teachings.

As one community in the world-wide Anabaptist movement, the EMC can benefit from many of the distinctive teachings and practices of the early Anabaptists. Among these are:

- A continuing commitment to the Bible's authority, especially as understood through the example and teaching of Jesus
- Evangelism and church planting
- The importance of believers' churches and believers' baptism as a witness to the unique nature of the Church
- The continuing insistence that the church can never allow itself to be compromised by identifying with the authority, agendas, or political activities of any particular nation.
- A vibrant approach to discipleship and service
- Working to find ways to make real the priesthood of all believers, regardless of gender, race, social status, economics, ability, or intellect
- Continuing to move into the world in courageous acts of reconciliation and peacemaking.

6. How does EMC doctrine and lifestyle compare with the vision of the early Anabaptists?

7. What are some issues in our society that threaten our Anabaptist theology?

What's in a Name?

Mennonite

Darren Plett

1. What perceptions does the world around you have of Mennonites? Why? (Keep the discussion brief.)

2. Why do you believe the word Mennonite is included in our conference name?

Menno Simons was not the founder of the Anabaptists. The Anabaptist movement officially began in January 1525 when George Blaurock rebaptized Roman Catholic priest Conrad Grebel who in turn baptized several others. Menno Simons was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1524 and did not even become aware of this movement until six years later in 1531, when a priestly transfer brought him to the small town of Witmarsum.

Upon arrival in Witmarsum, Menno Simons heard that a man in a neighboring village had been executed for being baptized a second time. This incident aroused his interest; he searched the Scripture and to his dismay, found no evidence to support the practice of infant baptism. This raised a further question in his mind: if the Roman Catholic Church is wrong on infant baptism, could it also be wrong on other key aspects of faith and practice? Menno Simons began a *conscientious objective personal study of the Bible* upon which he further discovered that the

Bible did not teach the Roman Catholic view that the communion bread and wine changed into the actual flesh and blood of Christ during Mass.

His studies and his doubts about Roman Catholic faith and practice continued and in January of 1536, he renounced his connection with the Roman Catholic Church and was baptized by Obbe Philips. Within his first year of joining the Obbenites—one of many groups of Anabaptists—he was asked to be ordained as their leader. After careful consideration *he accepted ordination and with it all the dangers that were included* in becoming a leader of a heretical group.

3. What is required to do the kind of conscientious objective study of the Bible, undertaken by Menno Simons? Are we threatened by this type of study?

4. Are there still "dangers" associated with being known as *Mennonite*? What are they?

Menno Simons became a tireless leader, travelling all over northern Europe, where he inspired, organized and guided small groups of Anabaptist believers. Due to his prominence, his followers were soon called Mennists or Mennonites. The first recorded account of this name is in a written order by Countess Anne, who ruled a small province in central Europe. The presence of some small groups of violent Anabaptists was causing political and religious turmoil in her state, so she decreed that all Anabaptists were to be driven out. The order made an exception for the non-violent branch known at that time as the Mennists. Soon after this, most non-violent groups of Anabaptists became known as Mennists or Mennonites regardless of their connection with Menno Simons.

These Mennists under the guidance of their new leader maintained the earlier commitment of the first "ana-baptists"—Blaurock, Grebel, Felix Manz and others—to *be faithful to the teachings of the Bible, and to be willing to take whatever consequences resulted from their commitment.* Menno Simons called for nothing less than the reformation of all of life according to the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Bible.

The primary areas of contention with the Catholic Church were: baptism for adult believers, Christian non-violence, and a pure believers' church separate from the state. It was believed that for a country or state to remain united and for the citizens to remain loyal, only one faith or church could be permitted. Thus, persecution for Mennonites in Switzerland and the Netherlands and to a lesser degree in Germany, Moravia and Belgium became a grim reality. In all it is believed there were at least 4,000 Mennonite martyrs among the estimated 18,000 martyrs of the Reformation time period in Europe.

5. Several years ago it was suggested at an EMC Conference Council meeting that we work at better promoting the values of our Mennonite forebears. One concerned brother stood to his feet and challenged the group with the following words, "Let's just make sure we do not do this at the expense of Scripture." Has it escaped us that the first and primary value of our Mennonite forebears was unwavering obedience to the Word of God regardless of consequences?

6. And if we have trouble seeing that as the primary value of our Mennonite heritage, is it any wonder that the world that is watching us has trouble believing this to be our primary value?

7. Can this reputation be restored?

As early as the 1530s, the first Mennonites found their way to Poland from north Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany and Moravia These first migrations were primarily in the interest of commerce. However, beginning in the 1540s, many of the persecuted Mennonites began migrating to Poland as well. The Mennonites were tolerated in Poland, but restrictions were often placed on them regarding citizenship and land ownership. Despite these tensions, Mennonites slowly developed the land, increased production and developed their trades and skills. Their products were sought after, and landlords were eager to have Mennonite tenants.

Many Mennonites originally settled in the lowlands of the Vistula Delta, where the land is below sea level. All previous attempts at draining these swamplands had failed. Although the cost was high (it is estimated that up to 80 per cent of the settlers here died of swamp fever), Mennonites slowly and methodically reclaimed the land so that by the time they moved to Russia, this Delta was one of the best agricultural production areas in Poland.

During this time in Poland the Dutch Mennonites primarily remained a cultural enclave. It was also during this time that they gave up the Dutch language and accepted High German and Low German as their "official" languages.

While this group of Dutch-North German Mennonites migrated, settled and grew in Poland a second group known as the Swiss-South German wing of the Mennonite church largely migrated to Germantown, Pennsylvania, in the late 17th century. This group has now mostly become the Amish and Old Mennonite denominations. This early group of Mennonites and Mennonite-Quakers wrote the *first formal protest against slavery in the United States.*

8. Although standing up for Social Justice has always been a part of our Mennonite DNA, it has more recently with the development of the evangelical component to our theology also become somewhat of a "bone of contention" among some Mennonite groups or churches. Share some thoughts on the harmonious integration of social justice and evangelism. (James 1:27, Micah 6:8, Matthew 25:34–40)

In 1768 Catherine the Great of Russia sent officials to Mennonites living in Prussia and offered them the opportunity to settle and farm the fertile land north of the Black Sea (in the present-day Ukraine). In exchange she offered them religious freedom, military exemption, and financial aid for resettling. Over the years these Mennonite farmers were once again very successful. By the beginning of the 20th century they owned large agricultural estates and had gained success as industrial entrepreneurs in the cities.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War (1917–1921) the success of Mennonites was viewed as a serious threat to the government and all of their farms and enterprises were expropriated. Beyond expropriation, Mennonites also suffered severe persecution—hundreds of Mennonite men, women and children were murdered in the process. Mennonite emigration to the Americas (U.S., Canada and Paraguay) had already started as early as 1874, but it accelerated dramatically during and following the civil war.

9. During a visit to Belize—in disguise—I was able to interview an ex-Belizian army official. When asked about the Mennonite people—he responded, "That is the best thing that ever happened to Belize. Our country's ability to feed itself is totally due to the agricultural abilities of the Mennonite people." It seems that each Mennonite migration has been precipitated by both faith elements and commerce/economic elements. Subsequently, each Mennonite migration has also brought opportunities for Mennonite people to develop land and commerce, often against very high odds. Why is it that most of these opportunities have been met largely with success?

10. To what degree has God supernaturally blessed and to what degree have we "made it happen"? (Deuteronomy 8:10–18)

11. Are we still a sought after people known for our hard work, ingenuity, and integrity? Is this a spiritual gift?

The 20th century has seen several more "official" migrations and movements of Mennonite groups as well as a new awakening to evangelism and foreign missions among established Mennonite congregations and denominations. Today it is estimated that there are approximately 1.6 million Mennonites worldwide. The largest populations of Mennonites are in Ethiopia, Canada, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United States. Significant numbers of Mennonites can also be found scattered throughout China, Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Paraguay. In all there are congregations of Mennonites in at least 51 countries on six continents, including the Netherlands where Menno Simons was born.

The most basic unit of organization among Mennonites is the church. There are thousands of Mennonite churches, many of which are members of regional or area conferences, some of which are members of larger national or world conferences. Independent churches can contain as few as 50 members or as many as 20,000 members. Worship, church discipline and lifestyles vary widely between progressive, moderate, conservative, Old Order and orthodox Mennonites. For these reasons, no single organization of Mennonites anywhere can credibly claim to represent, speak for, or lead all Mennonites worldwide.

12. Name some of the many significant contributions that Mennonite people have made world-wide.

13. With all its diversity, is there still something that truly unites Mennonites?

14. How do we cope with the fact that North American society associates both a theological meaning and an ethnic meaning to this word?

15. When we call ourselves Mennonites, are we still saying what we want to say?

16. Does the title *Mennonite* help society around us to gain a correct image of who we are?

Significant information for this lesson has been used from *The Christian Life*, *Seeking to Be Faithful* by Harvey Plett, and *Saints and Sinners* by Delbert Plett, as well as Wikipedia.

What's in a Name?

Kleine Gemeinde

Royden Loewen

1. What is the English meaning of the term *Kleine Gemeinde* and why do you think its members accepted the term for themselves even though it had been coined by their opponents?

Beginnings

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had its beginning in 1812 in the Molotschna Colony in southern Russia. Founded in 1804, the Molotschna was the second major colony to be established by Low German-speaking Mennonites from West Prussia (northern Poland), whose ancestors in turn had come from the Netherlands. The first Mennonite colony in Russia, Chortitzer Colony or the "Old Colony," had been established in 1789 and is the ancestral home of Chortitzer, Sommerfelder, Bergthaler and Old Colony Mennonites of today.

The Kleine Gemeinde was to be the first of several church groups established by reform minded Mennonites in Russia. It attracted members from the so-called Grosze Gemeinde (Large Church) and drew them from numerous different villages on the Molotschna. The first leader of the Kleine Gemeinde was a young minister, Klaas Reimer, who had already become dismayed by the low spiritual life, lack of personal morality, and lax church discipline he saw among the Mennonites in Prussia. In one of his early writings Reimer "bewailed the careless

and light-hearted living he experienced when working with a group of carpenters where nothing but frivolous banter continued all day."

In addition, he saw the practice of corporal punishment and police power by Molotschna colony authorities as contrary to the Anabaptist teachings of non-resistance and the separation of church and state. His objections heightened when the Mennonite church responded to a government request that the colonists swear allegiance to the Czar and make contributions of horses and money to the Russian army during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812.

Feeling that the church was erring in these matters, Reimer intensified his close study of the Scriptures and Anabaptist writings. In 1812 Reimer was invited by a small group, who shared his feelings, to conduct services in private homes in two Molotschna villages without the consent of the church elders. In time the members of this group stopped attending services in the main churches and the church leaders, seeing the small group as a threat, pressured it to return to the fold and even threatened banishment from the colony.

No Longer the True Church

By this time, however, Reimer had concluded that the existing Mennonite church in its unreformed state could no longer be considered to comprise the true church, and led his group formally to disassociate itself from it. Reimer found this decision difficult. He confessed, "It is not within the power of man to leave a church when he cannot find sanctuary in another…[but] as Menno Simons says, nothing displeases Satan more than to see people leave the [false] church, and according to the Word of the Lord, exercise discipline earnestly through the ban and confess God's Work before men."

In 1814 the small group chose Reimer as the *Aeltester*, or bishop, of a separate church. Two years later the church had grown to 20 members. Strong opposition to the new body, however, continued from members of the other Mennonite churches. Its leaders were threatened with banishment and the new church was derisively called "Kleine Gemeinde," the small church. Its members were also dubbed *de Kleen-Gemeenda*

in Low German, punning on the word to mean "small minded." The people hesitantly came to accept the term Kleine Gemeinde, no doubt because it fit well the idea that any true church consisted of those of the "narrow way" and "few be there that find it." (Matthew 7:14)

2. Why was it important for Klaas Reimer to leave the "Grosze Gemeinde"? Could he have effected change in the old church?

Partly because of its strict position on simple living the Kleine Gemeinde grew slowly, attracting only 120 members by 1838. Members, for example, were discouraged from using decorative brick on their houses or dress in current fashions. Despite this fact, historians such as John A. Toews have admitted that the Kleine Gemeinde had an ideal of renewal after which it strove. According to Toews, the actions of the Kleine Gemeinde "must be interpreted as attempts to return to early Anabaptist principles and practice even though inadequately understood."

It was not until 1843 that Johann Cornies, the powerful head of the Molotschna Agricultural Society, impressed by the exemplary farms and moral conduct of this group, used his influence to convince the government to recognize the Kleine Gemeinde and grant them a status equal to other Mennonite churches. By this time the Kleine Gemeinde had become accepted, and was even asked by authorities to help mediate other church disputes.

Writings of Early Leaders

The philosophy of the Kleine Gemeinde came to be well known because of the prolific writings by its early leaders. These principles, for example, are summarized in a booklet written by Heinrich Balzer, a Mennonite minister and thinker who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1833 after becoming dismayed with the trends of "secularism" at Molotschna and "emotionalism" in its churches. Balzer became a very influential minister in the church he joined, and his booklet, entitled *Verstand und Vernunft* (Faith and Reason), was among the treasured writings brought to Manitoba by the Kleine Gemeinde and was later republished by other conservative church groups in North America.

Balzer made several points. The first exalted the first-century church as following the ideal lifestyle. The early Christians had been convinced by the Holy Spirit "that they would live more happily in this world by giving themselves completely to the simplicity of Christ…brotherly love made them like a great family and no one wished a privilege for himself at the expense of another." It was Menno Simons, stated Balzer, who "under the rubble of many errors of [historic] Christianity rediscovered the simple teachings of the Lord…namely, that believers should not think of vengeance, resistance, oath, secular learning and the great things of this world, but rather should keep always to the lowly and meek ones." This thinking had far-reaching implications for every aspect of life.

Other points emphasized the idea of "simplicity in Christ" and the need for a humble, faithful discipleship, separate from the state and above the lure of wealth. "The Church of Jesus Christ," wrote Balzer, "considers itself here in this world, not as a world citizenry, but rather as…a spiritual brotherhood…. Members who serve the worldly affairs of the church…must never think of themselves as…secular functionaries with any kind of authority."

The best occupation to ensure humility was farming; it alone could preserve "a genuine simplicity in Christ." As Balzer saw it, on small farms "we can find a plentiful livelihood through [hard work] and diligence under the blessing of God. And we should be satisfied in finding food and clothing; striving after greater wealth or a position of high distinction in this world would spiritually be only too harmful for the church." Business should be avoided because it gradually led Mennonites to become "conditioned to the doings of this world without even noticing it."

Education of children must be a primary concern for the true Christian community, but it too must be kept rudimentary "lest the young flowers of our church become biased against our principles." Indeed, education should be limited to "such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic, singing and anything else useful and handy for the simple practice of [the farm householder]" because "higher learning brings forth nothing

but sophistry, unbelief and corruption of the church; for 'knowledge puffeth up'" (1 Cor. 8:1).

Above all, Balzer insisted that the true congregation stress love and harmony. "Love," wrote Balzer, "works unity; unity gives firmness; firmness protects against decline." The importance of congregational love and personal humility was emphasized by other leaders who followed.

3. Is the idea of "simplicity in Christ" biblical?

New Sources of Farmland

In the 1860s most of the Kleine Gemeinde left the Molotschna to find new sources of farmland at one of many new daughter colonies, theirs at Borosenko. Here for the first time the Kleine Gemeinde lived together as a cohesive community and built their first church building. Their stay at Borosenko, however, was short lived for in 1874 the congregation joined the migration to North America of some 17,000 (one third of the total) Mennonites.

While most Molotschna-descendent Mennonites (some 10,000) chose to settle in the United States, mostly in Kansas, and most Chortitzer-descendent Mennonites (some 7,000) chose to settle in Canada, all in Manitoba, the Kleine Gemeinde split into two, with the largest group, perhaps 700 men, women and children coming to Manitoba and 300 to Nebraska. In Manitoba the Kleine Gemeinde split once more, with a minority settling at Scratching River (or Rosenort) and the majority in the East Reserve (in the villages of Blumenort, Steinbach and Gruenfeld, later Kleefeld).

Life in North America was difficult for the strict Kleine Gemeinde, especially as the migration itself was emotionally difficult, leading to a low spiritual time at the very time that it found itself a minority amongst many new church groups. To attempt to rejuvenate the church, Manitoba bishop Peter Toews invited John Holdeman, of whom he had read, to come and preach renewal. Holdeman visited Manitoba in 1879 just five years after the initial settlement and concluded that the Kleine Gemeinde was too lukewarm for renewal and that the only remedy

would be for its members to join his church. In the winter of 1881 to 1882 he returned to Manitoba and preached a combination of revival and the simple life, resulting in a painful schism, with about one half of the Kleine Gemeinde, including most of the ministers, establishing a Manitoba chapter of Holdeman's church, the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.

The silver lining in the cloud was a recommitment to the old values of discipleship among the remaining members and a reunion of the Nebraska and Manitoba chapters. The Kleine Gemeinde now redoubled its emphasis on discipleship consisting of simplicity, pilgrimage, sincerity and love. Hundreds of sermons and letters from this time, written by both ministers and lay people, women and men, testify to this outlook

Life in North America, however, did not stand still as new challenges always arose. In the 1890s those challenges came especially from Mennonite church groups who emphasized an emotional personal conversion (including assurance of salvation), seemed preoccupied with end times (premillennialism), waffled on radical non-resistance by allowing government office holding, and seemed to allow for fancy, pride-filled lifestyles. In July 1899 Kleine Gemeinde ministers from Manitoba and Nebraska gathered in Blumenort, Manitoba, to seek a unified response to these challenges.

A Number of Guidelines

After their deliberation the ministers issued a number of guidelines. The first was that the true disciple of Christ must decline work in any "government office, whether small or big," because to do so was to "serve two masters," one located in love, the other in force. Other guidelines warned about "non-Christian weddings," presumably for their frivolity and prideful displays. Another cited "singing practices which use part-singing" as simply leading "away from the simplicity of Christ." Yet another forbade attendance at Sunday Schools where children were given "lessons [that] do not agree with our confession of faith." Following the teaching in all old order groups, the ministers also explained that "photographs and picture-taking we hold to be unscriptural," simply because they "honour mortal and worldly man." And they reiterated

the need for plain funerals, with no eulogies or revivalistic sermons, but simply "an ordinary sermon" emphasizing pilgrimage, eternal life and a "hope" in God's mercy. Showing the level of siege the ministers felt at the time, they agreed that members should not attend "services led by a minister who is not a Kleine Gemeinder." The communiqué ensured the church's survival, but also guaranteed that it would remain small.

Maintaining this "old order" and "plain people" approach to faith would become more and more difficult. The richly detailed diary of Bishop Peter R. Dueck of Steinbach records the various temptations during his time in office from 1901 to 1919. It is replete with concerns of wild youth, fancy weddings and other social events, photography, entering into business, the support of public schools and especially, the arrival of the car in 1914. The car was especially troublesome as it was a loud, new technology that seemed to undermine the teachings of a simple, humble Christian discipleship. Another deep concern for the Kleine Gemeinde was the compulsory introduction in 1916 of English language, publicly inspected schools, over which the British Union Jack would fly. Mennonite leaders linked such schools to patriotism, militarism and wealth. The Kleine Gemeinde seriously considered joining the migration of 8,000 conservative Mennonites to Latin America, but in the end choose to stay in Canada.

Between the 1920s and 1940s the Kleine Gemeinde experienced continued pressure toward change. Always there was competition from other churches and their Sunday Schools who deemphasized the kind of discipleship that the Kleine Gemeinde believed it saw in the writings of the Anabaptists, especially Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Pieter Pietersz and the *Martyrs Mirror.* Revivalistic preachers emphasized assurance of salvation which the Kleine Gemeinde saw as prideful and even idolatrous; if a follower of Christ placed his or her "hope" and trust in God, how could one go about loudly "claiming" salvation. Others spoke of the end times as if they could be understood; the Kleine Gemeinde accepted the old Anabaptist idea of "amillennialism," the idea that the "thousand year reign of peace" was a time in this world in which Christians were called to live humble, nonviolent and loved-filled lives until they were called into eternity upon death.

4. Why did the Kleine Gemeinde oppose such teachings as "assurance of salvation" and "premillenialism"?

Times Were Stressful

Then there were pressures to join the modern missionary movement; for the agrarian Kleine Gemeinde it seemed a strange idea and one that de-emphasized the "simplicity of Christ." And there were continued worries of lifestyle—of photography, fashionable clothes, government pensions and higher education.

Times became more stressful for the Kleine Gemeinde. An increasing number of members wished to embrace everything that the old church had opposed and to set aside everything that it had taught as good. In 1937 the Canadian and U.S. (now relocated from Nebraska to western Kansas) branches of the Kleine Gemeinde met again, this time in Kansas, for a joint ministerial conference. The simple issue as they saw it was that too many members were "leaving the way of the Lord," a life of simplicity, and that "the little flock" needed to redouble efforts "to stand up for the truth."

Unlike the 1890s, the tide of time had turned. In 1944 the Kleine Gemeinde at Meade, Kansas, transformed into the independent Emmanuel Mennonite Church, cutting all ties to the historic church, accepting modern lifestyles, and teaching assurance of salvation and evangelical missions. A similar transformation occurred in Manitoba, although at a slower pace. Here the sharp break occurred in 1948 when the most conservative 15 per cent of the Kleine Gemeinde, including the long standing Steinbach area bishop, Peter P. Reimer, moved to Mexico, establishing Quellen Kolonie at Los Jagueyes, not far from settlements at Cuauhtemóc founded by Old Colony Mennonites in the 1920s.

After the migration change came rapidly to the Manitoba churches. Signalling these changes, the Kleine Gemeinde adopted the English name Evangelical Mennonite Church in 1952. Old values certainly continued. Especially in the rural churches a simple lifestyle continued to be preached, with reference to clothing and jewellery, radio and television, and expensive cars. The EMC also emphasized rural

life, accepting a widespread movement of "colonization" among U.S. Mennonites, and thus established several rural communities, the most notable at Arborg and Riverton in the Interlake region of Manitoba and at Kola and Wawanesa in western Manitoba. Even as the EMC saw the first Winnipeg church established, it strongly emphasized a total commitment to nonviolence, avoiding rough sport for adults, union membership, court action and police or military service of any kind. Instead the EMC taught the need for service, a sensitivity to the elderly and handicapped, peace and reconciliation, and the Anabaptist idea that "no one can know Christ truly, unless one followed him daily."

5. Do you feel that the final quote, a well known thought from Hans Denck, a 16th century Anabaptist, is appropriate for the Kleine Gemeinde?

The term *Kleine Gemeinde* lives on today in Mexico and among its mission churches and daughter colonies in Belize, Bolivia, Oklahoma, Texas, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta. In total this present-day Kleine Gemeinde has about 2,500 members. The Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Meade, Kansas, is also still in existence. In 2012 these bodies will join the EMC in a bicentennial celebration of God's guidance and faithfulness.

6. What elements of Kleine Gemeinde theology can you respect, which ones are you sad have been lost, and which ones are you glad have been dropped?

7. Does today's EMC have any Kleine Gemeinde "DNA" left in its bloodstream?

8. In what ways does the current EMC read the meaning of *Anabaptism* in a different way than the early Kleine Gemeinde read it?

What's in a Name?

Evangelical

David Thiessen

In this lesson, we want to look at the name *Evangelical*. What is the origin of this name? This will be followed by a review of the history of evangelicalism. We also want to look at evangelical beliefs and practices. Some questions will be raised for discussion at the end.

The Origin of the Term Evangelical

The term *Evangelical* originates from the Greek word *evangelion*, which is the word for "gospel" or "good news." Evangelicals are gospel people, committed to the good news of Jesus Christ and the central tenets of apostolic faith. Paul speaks of the gospel that he preached to the Corinthians, saying:

> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures… (1 Corinthians 15:2–4).

Many of the key beliefs held by evangelicals are found in this text. This is the core of the good news!

As the late Anglican evangelical John Stott pointed out, this means that Evangelicalism is neither "a recent innovation" nor "a deviation from Christian orthodoxy" (*Evangelical Truth* IVP, pp. 16–17).

1. Would you agree that 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 is a good summary of evangelical beliefs? What do you find in the text to support that viewpoint? Are there key evangelical beliefs that are missing in these verses?

History of the Evangelical Movement

16th Century

The Corinthian believers were not called "evangelicals" nor, for that matter, were any believers in the Early Church. That came much later. As far as we know, the first published use of the term "evangelical" was in 1531 by William Tyndale. Martin Luther referred to his breakaway movement as the *evangelische Kirche*, or evangelical church, to distinguish Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. The term evangelical is still used widely by Lutherans today.

Menno Simons also uses the word evangelical in his writings. For example, he says, "… true evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot lie dormant, but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love …" (p. 307, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*).

18th Century

The term *Evangelical* came into wider usage in the 18th century, with revivalistic preaching that emphasized personal salvation and piety, while downplaying rituals and traditions. What is known as the First Great Awakening, greatly expanded the evangelical movement in the 1740s. Revivals were led in the American colonies by Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards and Methodist George Whitefield. In England, John Wesley led the Methodist movement inside the Church of England.

19th Century

In the late 18th century and into the 19th century, evangelical faith continued to grow through what is known as the Second Great Awakening. This was primarily an American movement, with Charles Finney being one of its important preachers.

The start of the 19th Century saw the founding of a number of missionary societies, and the resultant expansion of evangelical faith far beyond English and American soil. Evangelicals during this period were also concerned and involved in social reform. An important example would be the work of the Clapham Sect in England. A key person in this group was William Wilberforce, who successfully campaigned for the abolition of slavery. Evangelicals were also very involved in other social and societal issues, especially in areas of education and health care.

A theology of Dispensationalism received considerable impetus in the 19th century through the work of English minister John Nelson Darby. Cyrus Scofield helped to promote this particular theology through his Scofield Reference Bible, dividing God's revelation in biblical history into seven different eras or dispensations. Among other things, New Testament Kingdom theology (e.g., Sermon on the Mount) was not seen as applicable to the present life of the church, but consigned to the Millennium after the return of Christ. Dispensationalists hold to a premillennialist eschatology.

Other notable 19th century evangelical leaders are Charles Spurgeon, a devout Calvinist preacher, who was involved in various social and religious organizations in England, and Dwight L. Moody, a much traveled evangelist, who started the Chicago Evangelization Society, later to be known as the Moody Bible Institute.

20th Century

In talking about the 20th century, we need to begin with a conservative theological movement in American Protestantism that rose to prominence in the 1920s in opposition to theological liberalism or "modernism." Here I am indebted to Bruce Shelley's article on Fundamentalism in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*.

Fundamentalism was primarily, at least in its beginnings, an attempt to protect doctrines (fundamentals) of the Christian faith from the damaging effects of modern thought. These doctrines or fundamentals included the virgin birth, the resurrection and deity of Christ, His

substitutionary atonement, the Second Coming, and the authority and inerrancy of the Bible.

From 1910 to 1915, a series of 12 small books was published, known as *The Fundamentals*. This was a significant offensive against liberal theology. This original group of "fundamentalists" was not identified with dispensationalism, nor with a crusade against the teaching of evolution. They repeatedly clarified their goal of preserving the central affirmations of the Christian faith.

In the 1920s, a militantly conservative voice began to be raised in what is known as the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy. Some of the concerns were: the undermining of biblical inerrancy through higher Biblical Criticism and the teaching of evolution as a theory of human origins. Over time, due to the tactics of some of its leaders, the fundamentalist movement became stereotyped as close-minded, belligerent and separatist.

By the 1950s, a separation between fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism became increasingly apparent. These new evangelicals, as they were sometimes called, held to the central beliefs of the historic Christian faith, but were more intellectually astute, socially concerned, and of a more cooperative spirit. The publishing of the evangelical periodical *Christianity Today*, with its founding editor, Carl F. H. Henry was an example of this new, more open and thoughtful form of evangelicalism. Then there was the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, the British Anglican evangelical leader John R. W. Stott, and other groups and individuals who would have considered themselves the heir of the spirit and purpose of the original fundamentalists. It was also in the 1959 that the *Kleine Gemeinde* changed its name to the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, along with a budding movement of evangelism, church planting, and foreign missions.

Another significant development that began early in the 20th century was the rapid growth of Pentecostalism, starting with the Azusa Street Revival in 1906. Then the charismatic movement, beginning in the 1960s, led to the introduction of Pentecostal theology to many mainline denominations, and also to new charismatic groups. A lot of the

spiritual vibrancy and the worship singing of the Charismatics has been embraced by evangelical groups.

While the first 50 years of the 20th century saw evangelicalism struggle and perhaps lose some credibility and impact on the larger society, there has been significant growth of evangelical influence in the second half of the century. In 1977, a representative group of evangelical leaders met in Chicago to develop a document responding to evangelical issues and concerns. The result is known as "The Chicago Call." This document was a significant step of growth in the content and substance of evangelical Christianity.

At the close of the 20th century, the evangelical movement struggled to understand and assess the influences of postmoderism. For example, does the Emerging Church movement have potential to be a relevant evangelical response to the changes of the 21st century?

Beliefs and Practices of Evangelicals

1 Corinthians 1:1–4 has already been identified as a good New Testament summary of evangelical beliefs. Another summary can be found in Reformation theology:

First, *Sola Scriptura* – by Scripture alone. This is the conviction that God has revealed himself and his truth through the Old and New Testaments of the Scriptures, and is an authoritative guide to faith and practice. This means the Bible must always take precedence over reason, tradition, ecclesiastical authority, and individual experience.

Second, *Sola Gratia* – by grace alone. This means that God takes the initiative in salvation and in working out his plan for the world. We are powerless and lost other than for the love and mercy of God that we experience through the free and undeserved gift of grace.

Third, *Sola Fide* – by faith alone. God's offer of salvation requires a human and personal response. We need to be intellectually, emotionally, and physically involved in the outworking of his plan. The requirement of faith points to the need for human choice and volition.

David Hilborn, former head of theology of the Evangelical Alliance UK (online source), suggests the leaders of the Great Awakening in the 18th century developed a "revivalist" application of the Reformation *solas* through "itinerant preaching, evangelism and a deepened emphasis on conversion or 'new birth,' assurance of faith, and personal holiness." We could add that a number of Anabaptists already made a similar application of these Reformation principles back in the 16th century, not to mention additional applications.

The 18th century revivalists like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and John Wesley emphasized that assurance of salvation was a normative pattern of Christian experience. This assurance gave the evangelicals the confidence and inner dynamic for their preaching of the gospel and engaging in a changed way of life through good works.

Hilborn then provides a summary of evangelical characteristics adapted from studies of the movement by David Bebbington and Alister McGrath.

Biblicism: God, who is objectively "there," has revealed universal and eternal truth through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in such a way that people can grasp it.

Christocentrism: God's eternal Word became human in the historical man, Jesus of Nazareth, who definitively reveals God to humanity.

Crucicentrism: The good news of God's revelation in Christ is seen supremely in the cross, where atonement was made for people of every race, tribe, and tongue.

Conversionism: The truth of the eternal gospel must be appropriated in personal faith and repentance, which results in a discernable reorientation of the sinner's mind and heart towards God.

Activism: Gospel truth must be demonstrated in evangelism and social service.

(David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* [London: Unwin Hyman, 1989]. Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995]).

In conclusion, a few comments should be made about trends and practices among evangelicals in North America over the last 50 years. It should be noted that there is much diversity in the application and practice of evangelical faith in many different faith and denominational traditions. In Canada, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, along with their publication *Faith Today*, helps us keep abreast of issues, news and developments.

Evangelicals are giving increasing attention to the social dimension of the gospel, such as a response to poverty and crime, to environmental destruction, and to global relief and development. There is also a gradual fading of anti-Catholicism and a growing interest in the spirituality of Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

With regard to the century-long tension between Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism, more recently distinctions have emerged in matters such as "young earth" creationism and the state of Israel and its role in biblical prophecy. Normally, Evangelicals tend to "agree to disagree" on such things, whereas Fundamentalists are less flexible and more conservative in their approach to them (Evangelical Alliance, Dr. David Hilborn).

A significant evangelical development in Canada in the past 10 years or so has been the growth of a national church planting initiative. Church Planting Canada organizes a national church planting congress every other year. The EMC and its Church Planting Task Force has embraced this movement. In recent years, EMCers have been among the biggest groups that attend from different church conferences. It may be too early to assess the long-term impact, but it has the potential of igniting a church renewal, evangelism, and church growth movement in our Canadian Conference. It may be of interest that there seems to be a growing Anabaptist perspective surfacing at these church planting congresses.

The EMC has also worked at strengthening its Evangelical Anabaptist commitment through the work of an appointed Evangelical Anabaptist Committee (2004–2008) and subsequent discussions at our Conference General Board and Ministerial gatherings. This assessment of our Anabaptist understandings revealed the need for education and renewed commitment to our heritage, as we experienced renewal in our evangelical beliefs and practices back in the 1940s and '50s.

Let us continue to pray and serve where God has placed us, trusting that our Lord Jesus will continue to build His church as He has promised!

2. Compare and contrast Evangelical and Anabaptist beliefs and practices. Is there a difference between them? If so, describe the difference. Does Anabaptism bring something to the table that could strengthen the centrality of Christ in the larger evangelical community? What would you suggest?

3. Evangelicalism is Trinitarian, in keeping with historic Christian Orthodoxy. Yet is there an adequate emphasis on the Holy Spirit in both belief and practice? If not, how might this deficiency be rectified? Does Charismatic teaching and practice offer any help here?

4. Evangelicalism is known for its biblicism. Is the Evangelical church in danger of losing the Bible as its central reference point? What would be some indications that this is happening? In the worship service? In how preaching happens? In our private and family lives? Suggest some corrective measures to develop and strengthen a way of life, informed by the Holy Scriptures.

5. We have had a number of Evangelical Anabaptist scholars speaking at some recent EMC annual conventions: Ron Sider (2006), Arley Loewen (2007), Pierre Gilbert (2009), and David Shenk (2010). It may be a test of your memory, but can you recall the main thrust of their sermons, or the impressions that you were left with? What did these speakers contribute to our understanding of Evangelical Anabaptism?

What's in a Name?

Church

Darryl Klassen

This study will examine what is meant by the word *church*, both from a biblical as well as historical perspective and our *Statement of Faith*.

When the first believers came together following Pentecost they did not see the formation of this group as something new. According to the teaching of Scripture they believed that they were the continuation of the Old Testament prophecy concerning the Remnant. It was Isaiah in particular who spoke of the Remnant, writing:

> In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return… (Isaiah 10:20–22).[1]

This Remnant would come out of the masses and be a faithful people, visibly obedient, and dedicated to the Lord. So it was that the first believers, having the Holy Spirit poured out on them at Pentecost, emerged as this Remnant, a special people called out by God. In this way they formed an assembly that continued the OT promise to be the people of God.

The English word *church* represents this concept of God's people coming together into the body of Christ. However, *church* comes from two Greek words used in the New Testament to describe the meetings of Christ's followers. One might say that *church* is a dynamic equivalent translation peculiar to English speakers. Along with that statement one must add that *church* as such is found nowhere in the Greek NT.

1. What are your perceptions of the term "church"? Reflect on your friends' impression of the Church. How do they see the Church today?

Church Was Assembly

What we do find is the Greek word *ekklesia*. The basic meaning of the word *ekklesia* was "assembly," so that when the people of God came together they were the *Ekklesia*.[2] It was not so important where this activity was done but that it was done at all. The Church was not a building but the assembly of the people of God. Today we often say we are going to church, referring to a place, when in fact we are going *to be* the church as we gather together. If God dwells in a building it is not one made of human hands but of spiritual stones of which the chief cornerstone is Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:4–5).

Ekklesia was a general term used for any kind of assembly in any Greek city. It was the Jews who adapted this word out of classical Greek for their own use to describe the assemblies of Israel. Only in the context of the NT is the term used to refer to the Church as we know it.[3] One example of this is found in the letter to the Galatians where the Apostle Paul writes *"to the churches in Galatia"* (Galatians 1:2).

Our second Greek word rounds out the origin of the English word *church*. *Kyriakos* is a Greek adjective meaning *the Lord's.* Northern European peoples, such as the Germans, used a form of this word to describe buildings where the Church met, calling it *the Lord's house*. Eventually the word *kyriakos* was adapted and morphed into the language of the people using it. For instance, in German the word became *Kirche* and in Scotland *Kirk*. Again, while the word *kyriakos* came to mean a building in these languages, the original intention was that it referred to the Lord's people or the Lord's assembly in Scripture.[4]

Christianity Legalized

Early in the fourth century, the term *church* took on new meaning when the Emperor Constantine gained power over the entire Roman Empire. Since his rise to power was due in part to his belief that Christ was on his side in a significant battle, he legalized Christianity. In time the Church and the State were united in political power. For several centuries, until the Reformation in the 16th century, the partnership of Church and State would lead to innumerable abuses that many came to associate mostly with the Church itself. Constantine's efforts to empower the Church would in reality lead to a period of darkness and impotence for the Church.[5]

Due to the all-embracing nature of the Church-State relationship, it became difficult to distinguish between Christianity as a political identity and true Christianity as a faith. As early as the fourth century, Augustine coined the phrase "the invisible church" to describe this difficulty.[6] Therefore no one really knew who belonged to the true Church. All that was known of the Church was the institution and its heavy laws and edicts, thereby leaving a bitter taste concerning attitudes about the Church.

By contrast, 1,200 years later the Anabaptists saw the Church as not invisible, not lost in the masses of Christendom, but certainly identifiable through the lifestyle of holiness, love and peace. In other words, it took a period of searching and maturing to come back to the NT understanding of Church as a people called by God to be faithful. Specifically, the Anabaptists viewed the Church as a "fellowship of saints, namely of all believing and regenerated Christians, children of God born again from above, by the word and the Spirit."[7] Other reformers of the same period of time, such as John Calvin, saw the Church as those people among whom the Word of God is preached and the sacraments administered according to Christ's instruction. Luther and Zwingli continued to teach the invisible Church theory in the midst of a Christian society. For the Anabaptists who held to believer's baptism, voluntary membership in the Church, and the life of discipleship, the Church could be nothing but visible.

2. How involved should the Church be in the arena of politics? What are the downsides?

Similarities Among Branches

Despite this fundamental difference, there are many similarities between the Anabaptist view of the Church and other branches of the Church. A contemporary Lutheran church states that the Church Universal consists of all those who truly believe on Jesus Christ as Saviour. They go on to say that only a baptized person who has confessed a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and lives a life consistent with the community of faith can be a member. This particular assembly has adopted the congregational form of government to operate its affairs.[8]

Those who ascribe to Wesleyan theology also believe in key points that agree with Anabaptist perspectives. "Wesleyans believe in one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the Savior of all men and women who put their faith in him alone for eternal life. We believe that those who receive new life in Christ are called to be holy in character and conduct, and can only live this way by being filled with the Lord's Spirit." Concerning their statement of faith on the Church, Wesleyans believe, "that the Christian Church is the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ.... The Church on earth is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ's instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands."[9]

Another example from the Reformed camp of Christianity reveals that Anabaptists and the Reformed Churches have solidarity on the place of the Church in faith, life and practice. "We affirm that the shape of Christian discipleship is congregational, and that God's purpose is evident in faithful Gospel congregations, each displaying God's glory in the marks of authentic ecclesiology. We deny that any Christian can truly be a faithful disciple apart from the teaching, discipline, fellowship, and accountability of a congregation of fellow disciples, organized as a Gospel Church.... We deny that loyalty to any denomination or fellowship of churches can take precedence over the claims of truth and faithfulness to the Gospel."[10]

3. From your own understanding of Church and the sample statements of faith above, how do the churches differ in their view of faith and life? Are the differences greater or lesser?

In the EMC *Statement of Faith* we see that our conference belongs to a family of like-minded churches building the Kingdom of God together. Our statement of faith echoes the sentiment of the visible assembly of the Lord's people who live out their faith for the world to see: "We believe all who have experienced new life in Christ belong to his church. All who repent and make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord are united to his holy church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.... We believe God calls the church to conform to the image of Christ, to care for its members and to evangelize all people."[11]

Each of these statements is the result of growth, learning, and diligent study of the Scriptures. For instance, the EMC would have been hard-pressed to confess that the church was "to evangelize all people" 200 years ago. Even a hundred years ago our forebears believed it was not their business to spread the gospel except among their own people and that only after the plowing was done. If our conviction is truly to evangelize all peoples, our conference needs to look beyond German-speaking Mennonite peoples as the focus of our mission work and church planting. If we believe that we have something to share with the wider body of Christ, we must reach beyond our comfortable walls and into realms that have never heard the terms *Mennonite* or *Anabaptist*.

We have come a long way from the Reformation where our forebears discovered the NT Church as the visible, discipling, and gospel-believing assembly, to the past century where it was renewed afresh in our minds, to today where we stand in possession of an incredible heritage of faith. Today's generation of believers are building on the foundation of Jesus Christ and on the walls of the Church that were built on that foundation. We must continue to build faithfully on the work that has been passed on to us and never forget what it means to be the Church.

Perhaps because of the many ecclesiastical positions and various abuses perpetrated by the Church as an institution, existing churches have

changed their names while church plants have avoided the title *church*. They choose instead to be called *fellowships*, *chapels*, *centres*. Some avoid even those titles, such as The Meeting Place. It is likely that they want to put behind them the public perception of Church and reach out anew to the disenfranchised. However, it is not the name you give to the assembly, but the Spirit of God and our submission to Jesus in obedience and love that will draw people to our gatherings. In the end people will default to that place where we say, "You should come to my church." May God give us the joy of fellowship to be that excited about our churches.

4. If you were to name a church plant what would be the best way to describe your assembly so that the unchurched would be drawn in?

5. In what ways can EMC churches engage, relate and partner with churches of the other branches (Lutheran, Wesleyan, Reformed, etc.)?

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1 Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way*. (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1980), 38.

2 Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), 130.

3 Ferguson, 130.

4 Ferguson, 129.

5 John McManners, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 55ff.

6 Lederach, 39–40.

7 Lederach, 42.

8 www.estevanfaithlutheran.com

9 www.wesleyan.org

10 www.Reformationtheology.com

11 *EMC Statement of Faith*, 10. THE CHURCH.

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Test: which entry is misspelled?

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