Born-Again Brethren in Christ: Anabaptism, Evangelicalism, and the Cultural Transformation of a Plain People

DEVIN C. MANZULLO-THOMAS*

Abstract: This essay explores how, in the middle decades of the twentieth century, leaders and laypeople in the Brethren in Christ Church constructed, adopted, and deployed an evangelical identity. Initially, this new identity drew community members out of ethnic isolation and into the broader American society; at the same time, it enabled select church leaders to use evangelical venues to advance a decidedly theological critique of war and to reinforce religious practices of simplicity and humility. Later, some Brethren in Christ combined this evangelical identity with church traditions of simplicity and nonparticipation in war in order to advance arguments about pacifism and economic justice, thus contributing to the rise of a progressive evangelicalism. Ultimately, then, this evangelical identity allowed the Brethren in Christ to integrate themselves into American society while simultaneously maintaining a sense of religious and cultural particularity.

In June 1933, scores of men, women, and children descended upon Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, for the yearly General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church in North America. Delegates to the meeting filled their days with fellowship, vigorous debate about denominational issues, and spirited evangelistic preaching. The delegate roster showed that most attendees shared common surnames, all Swiss-German in origin: Hostetter, Brubaker, Wenger, Climenhaga, Herr, and Hoover.[1] And as a photograph from the event attests, these church members and leaders embodied their distinctive religious values and cultural practices in visible ways (Figure 1). They donned clothing meant to set them apart: women wore ankle-length dresses in muted colors, head coverings, and bonnets, without jewelry or other adornment, while men wore dark suits with upright collars and no neckties. They built and worshiped in small, undecorated church buildings that often had neither steeple nor pulpit,

*Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas is director of The Sider Institute for Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan Studies at Messiah College and a Ph.D. student in American history at Temple University. The author wishes to thank E. Morris Sider and John R. Yeatts at Messiah College; Harriet Sider Bicksler at the Brethren in Christ Historical Society; Lila Corwin Berman and David Harrington Watt at Temple University; and the anonymous readers for *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, all of whom read and responded with helpful suggestions to various drafts of this essay.

1. For a list of delegates see *General Conference Minutes*, 1933.

such as the white clapboard meetinghouse in the background of the photo. And members refused to join the military or participate in electoral politics, endeavoring to follow literally the biblical mandates to "love thy neighbor" and "love not the world."[2]

Figure 1: Members of the Brethren in Christ denomination at the General Conference of 1935. Note the distinctive clothing worn by men and women, as well as the simple meetinghouse in which church members met for worship. (Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives).

This 1933 image contrasts sharply with another photograph of the Brethren in Christ community, taken some fifty years later at the church's 1984 General Conference (Figure 2). The image suggests that by the late twentieth century the Brethren in Christ had abandoned the outward symbols of their religious culture and resembled more closely than ever the mainstream of North American society. By this time, church members wore more contemporary fashions: neckties for men, pants for women, and far fewer head coverings and plain coats. Moreover, the church embraced the commercial practices and aesthetics of modern denominationalism, as represented by the church logo.

2. Respectively, these mandates appear in Mt. 5:44 and 1 Jn. 2:15 (King James Version).

Figure 2: Members of the Brethren in Christ Church at the General Conference of 1984. Notice the change in attire, as well as the modern iterations of religious material culture, such as the church logo. (Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives).

These photographs may suggest that the Brethren in Christ followed a simple path of cultural accommodation in the twentieth century, purging their ethnic conventions in order to assimilate into North American society. Yet even into the 1980s many Brethren in Christ still thought of themselves as religiously and culturally distinctive. Leaders and laypeople continued to refer to the community as a brotherhood, avoiding the institutional language of denomination. Similarly, the Canadian bishop Harvey Sider claimed that the group's "distinctives of piety, peace, and separation" fueled its sense of mission.[3] And the church's doctrinal statement continued to affirm nonresistance in the face of violence and separation from an unregenerate world as key elements of the group's religious identity.[4] So how did this religious community manage to make sense of itself and its environment amid the changes in American culture in the last half of the twentieth century? For the Brethren in Christ, as with other ethnic religious communities, Protestant evangelicalism provided one of the most successful strategies for integrating into American society while maintaining a sense of religious particularity.

3. Harvey R. Sider, "Church Growth and/or Doctrine—Which?" *Evangelical Visitor*, April 25, 1980, 3.

4. *Manual of Doctrine and Government of the Brethren in Christ Church* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1961; revised, 1973), 29-30.

Particularity and pluralism have long fascinated scholars of American religion. In 1955, the sociologist Will Herberg observed that religion provided a critical mechanism of social integration in twentieth-century America. Newcomers found a pathway out of ethnic isolation by assimilating into one of three religious groups: mainline Protestantism, Catholicism, or Judaism.[5] For Herberg, these religious bodies offered an identity "at once both genuinely American and . . . familiar" at the local level.[6] But Herberg's analysis ignored those Protestant confessional groups that found mainline denominations incompatible with their theological and cultural convictions. In the mid-twentieth century, an array of Protestants alienated from the mainline denominations crafted, both separately and together, a movement they called evangelicalism. As a vehicle for social integration, evangelicalism enabled Protestants of all stripes to become American. Yet it facilitated that integration without obliterating what these groups saw as important differences.

Only a few scholars of twentieth-century American religion have regarded evangelicalism as an entity constructed in this manner, and even fewer have identified a role for Anabaptist communities in this process.[7] Yet the Brethren in Christ represent one group that strategically—and sometimes paradoxically—fashioned and employed evangelicalism in this way.

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, leaders and laypeople in the Brethren in Christ Church constructed, adopted, and deployed an evangelical identity. This identity allowed the community to Americanize while simultaneously retaining a sense of itself as religiously and culturally distinctive. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Brethren in Christ integrated into the burgeoning evangelical mainstream. This association drew the community out of ethnic isolation and into the broader American society, accelerating processes of assimilation and politicization already at work among these so-called plain people. Though some resisted this alliance, select bishops, clergy, and scholars used evangelical venues to advance a decidedly theological critique of war, while others borrowed evangelical resources for reinforcing religious practices of simplicity and humility. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of leaders and

5. Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1983; original, 1955).

6. Ibid., 31.

7. For scholars who have argued for evangelicalism as a tool for both social integration and resisting theological and cultural homogenization, see Kurt W. Peterson, "Constructing the Covenant: The Evangelical Covenant Church and Twentieth-Century American Religious Culture, 1920-1970" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2003), especially chap. 6; and Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2006), especially chaps. 4-5.

laypeople drew on both their evangelical identity and their church traditions of simplicity and nonparticipation in war to advance political and theological arguments about pacifism and economic justice, thus contributing to the rise of a progressive evangelicalism. By the early 1980s, then, the Brethren in Christ celebrated their transition away from ethnic particularity even as they continued to repurpose beliefs and practices tied deeply to their Swiss-German heritage. In other words, the Brethren in Christ had been—to borrow a phrase from evangelical soteriology—born again.

The Less-Than-Quiet in the Land

The Brethren in Christ represent one small Protestant community in the diverse religious landscape of contemporary North America.[8] Most early members were German-speaking immigrants who settled in frontier Pennsylvania in the mid-eighteenth century. They traced their theological roots to sixteenth-century Europe and the Radical Reformation of Anabaptism. Driven to North America by persecution on the continent, Anabaptists, including the Mennonites and the Amish, came to be known as "the quiet in the land." Early Brethren in Christ likewise developed this reputation.

This quietism developed in part from a literal yet selective interpretation of the biblical injunctions to "resist not evil" and "come out from among them, and be ye separate."[9] Members refused to serve in the military, swear oaths, pursue litigation, hold political office, or exercise the franchise—distinctly countercultural practices codified as the church's doctrine of nonresistance. Along with nonresistance, the Brethren in Christ also embraced a doctrine of nonconformity, a theological and social-structural arrangement intended to distinguish members from their North American neighbors through alternative patterns of dress, speech, consumption, and recreation. Nonconformity demanded separation from certain social activities and individual vices such as dancing, watching movies, drinking alcohol, using tobacco, and playing organized sports. It also necessitated prescribed forms of dress. These practices drew sharp

8. The standard denominational history of the Brethren in Christ is Carlton O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1978). The social character and religious culture of the Brethren in Christ in this period are captured by Owen H. Alderfer, "The Mind of the Brethren in Christ: A Synthesis of Revivalism and the Church as Total Community" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1964); and Martin H. Schrag, "The Brethren in Christ Attitude Toward the 'World': A Historical Study of the Movement from Separation to an Increasing Acceptance of American Society" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1967).

9. Respectively, these injunctions appear in Mt. 5:39 and 2 Cor. 6:17 (KJV).

and visible boundaries between the faithful remnant and the larger culture.[10]

But the doctrines and practices associated with nonconformity and nonresistance constituted only one part of the Brethren in Christ ethnicity.[11] Almost all members also shared a common Swiss or South German ancestry. They used Pennsylvania Dutch in both print and in formal worship settings into the first decades of the twentieth century, although English entered into the community as early as the 1870s and 1880s. They practiced endogamy, further ensuring group continuity. Moreover, most members owned farms and embraced agricultural vocations, geographically distancing themselves from the urban hubs of American life. When members did move from one location to another, they followed patterns of group migration and settlement, customs intended to preserve group identity and ensure the practice of mutual aid and ethnic solidarity. Along with these practices of peoplehood, the Brethren in Christ also used affective language to cement their ethnic identity: Members referred to the community as a "brotherhood" and to individual members as brother or sister.[12]

Yet unlike other ethno-religious Protestant communities in this era, especially their fellow Swiss-German Amish and Mennonite kin, the Brethren in Christ embraced ideas and practices that tied them to the Protestant mainstream. From their origins they blended Anabaptist convictions with a Pietist soteriology that emphasized conversion, revivalism, and devotional prayer and Bible reading. In the late nineteenth century they added to their theological mix an American holiness message

10. On Brethren in Christ nonconformity and nonresistance before the mid-twentieth century, see M. J. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Position Through Three Generations* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003); Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 102-124; and Schrag, "Brethren in Christ Attitude," 55-76, 154-192.

11. In this essay, I follow the sociologist Milton M. Gordon in conceptualizing ethnicity as a "shared feeling of peoplehood." An ethnic community is primarily a community that perceives a shared ancestry and future, although that community may also be a primordially rooted collectivity as well as a group with a shared interest or national origin, or both. See Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 24, 29.

12. On the social contours of Brethren in Christ life before the mid-twentieth century, see Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 8-9; and Alderfer, "The Mind of the Brethren in Christ," 271-278. On the use of German and Pennsylvania Dutch languages, see Omer E. King, "From Pennsylvania Dutch to English in the Brethren in Christ Church," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 8, no. 1 (April 1985), 37-46. King notes that although English became the primary language of denominational publications starting in the 1880s, formal and informal use of German persisted until the 1900s or 1910s. The denominational newspaper, founded in 1887, primarily used English, but the group's earliest hymnals, published between 1874 and 1906, used both German and English, although the German disappeared after that latter date. See H. Royce Saltzman, "A Historical Study of the Function of Music among the Brethren in Christ" (D.M.A. diss., University of Southern California, 1964), 312-315; and King, "From Pennsylvania Dutch to English," 43.

that promised perfection through an instantaneous personal experience of sanctification. During these same decades they embraced a number of outward-looking Protestant innovations such as domestic and foreign missionary work, church-sponsored schools and colleges, and the use of mass media, as exemplified in the church's newspaper, the *Evangelical Visitor*.[13] These factors linked the Brethren in Christ to the broader Protestant world even as they remained ensconced within their particular ethnic subculture.

But that continued cultural separatism began to transform amid the sociocultural changes of the twentieth century. Organizationally, the denomination bureaucratized and expanded its missionary programs, educational institutions, and benevolence agencies. Community members pursued higher levels of education, and many left the farm, often to run small businesses or enter professions in urban and suburban settings. The advance of radio and television communication brought the outside world into members' homes and lives. By the end of World War II, shifting global realities, growing economic prosperity, and the rise of mass culture resulted in members' increased social and geographic mobility.[14] In these ways and others, the professedly separatist Brethren in Christ encountered modern America.

As church members and leaders tentatively entered this unfamiliar world, they faced an existential dilemma: how to maintain a collective identity and culture in an increasingly commercialized, suburbanized, and globalized environment. The authority of tradition no longer seemed sufficient. Heated intra-group conflict erupted, and the community began to divide over issues of doctrine and practice. In response, leaders attempted to enforce rigid standards of nonconformity and nonresistance. In 1935, they tightened their doctrine of sanctification to ensure the possibility of human perfection. In 1937, they prescribed a strict church dress code. Five years later, shortly after the U.S. declared war on Germany, they prohibited military enlistment and threatened combatants and noncombatants alike with excommunication. But these efforts met with opposition and largely failed to produce enduring distinctiveness.[15]

On the one hand, the Brethren in Christ's historic commitment to the gathered church and to particular ways of practicing nonresistance and nonconformity anchored them to tradition. On the other, their increasing integration into North American society opened them up to new ideas,

13. On these developments, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 162-200, 258-269, and 284-317.

14. For an overview of the ways in which these demographic shifts affected Brethren in Christ people's practice of nonconformity and nonresistance, see ibid., 342-365.

15. For more, see ibid., 321-331, 350-356, 387-393.

especially new religious ideas. Thus, beginning in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Brethren in Christ sought to resolve their disunity by joining with other Protestant groups to craft a new way to be Christian in modern America: evangelicalism.

Encountering Neo-Evangelicalism

In contrast to the Brethren in Christ's increasing disunity, post-World War II evangelicalism emerged as a strong, united front of born-again Protestants. Movement leaders such as the Reformed intellectual Carl F. H. Henry and the Congregationalist minister Harold J. Ockenga wanted to transcend the combative and divisive spirit that fundamentalism had cultivated in the 1920s and 1930s. To do so, these leaders reclaimed the irenic term "evangelical"—often referring to themselves as neo-evangelicals—and assumed a more conciliatory attitude toward North American society. They cultivated relationships with other Protestant groups with born-again beliefs, including holiness Wesleyans, Mennonites, Pentecostals, and other ethnic and confessional groups. Leaders within many of these denominations often had other reasons for inter-confessional cooperation. Yet together these so-called neo-evangelicals championed cultural relevance and deplored fundamentalism's anemic social conscience, even as they retained a conservative theology centered on biblical inerrancy.[16]

One institutional expression of this neo-evangelical alliance was the National Association of Evangelicals (N.A.E.). Organized in 1942, this para-church agency encouraged "voluntary united action among the several groups of Evangelical Christians in America."[17] The N.A.E.'s membership roll contained a variety of distinct denominations: fundamentalist Baptists; peace churches; Dutch Reformed Calvinists; and more. According to James Murch, the N.A.E.'s earliest historian, members

16. On the emergence of postwar neo-evangelicalism from fundamentalism, see George M. Marsden, *Understanding Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 62-82; and Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 141-160. On its intellectual and theological foundations, see Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15-35. On cultural relevance, see D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan D. Ree, 2002), 54-83, 172-200. On neo-evangelical criticisms of fundamentalism's social conscience, see Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1947); and David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 17-22. For discussion of the denominations and traditions represented in the early N.A.E., which included Mennonite, Wesleyan, and Pentecostal groups, see Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 149-150.

17. "National Association of Evangelicals Constitution," *United Evangelical Action*, June 1, 1943, 7, quoted in James DeForest Murch, *Cooperation without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956), 66.

gathered at annual conventions to pursue "purposes common to all," including more effective evangelism, more expansive missionary endeavors, and the "preservation of the principle of separation of church and state."[18] Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the N.A.E. also provided a federal lobby for evangelicals who began to pursue political ends long before the rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s.[19]

The Brethren in Christ came into contact with the N.A.E. as early as 1945, when an N.A.E. representative visited the church's governing body, the General Conference, at their annual session. According to the minutes of the gathering, the representative "brought greetings and spoke briefly on the purpose and work of the organization."[20] But the General Conference made no move toward affiliation until 1947, when it appointed a committee of bishops to study the "desirability and feasibility" of N.A.E. membership.[21] Two years later, the committee recommended that the church formally join the N.A.E., arguing that such an action would "link [the Brethren in Christ] with the larger evangelical groups and consequently give our constituency greater influence in the promotion of the work of Christ and the Church."[22] Yet not all leaders endorsed the idea, and proponents and opponents hotly debated the recommendation at the church's 1949 General Conference.[23] The final vote revealed a "conscientious and worthy difference of opinion," according to the conference minutes: 123 in favor, 38 opposed.[24]

Though a minority resisted, many Brethren in Christ leaders subsequently attended N.A.E. annual conventions and wrote about their experiences in the *Evangelical Visitor*, extolling the virtues of the

18. Murch, *Cooperation*, 54-55.

19. An early (hagiographic) history of N.A.E. is Murch, *Cooperation*. For a scholarly analysis of early N.A.E., see Carpenter, "An Evangelical United Front," chap. 8 in *Revive Us Again*.

20. *General Conference Minutes*, 1945, 6.

21. Quotation from *General Conference Minutes*, 1947, 77. Committee members included Jesse F. Lady, Ohmer U. Herr, Ray I. Witter, C. N. Hostetter Jr., and Samuel F. Wolgemuth. Early reports of the committee tasked with exploring N.A.E. affiliation indicated that the Brethren in Christ had already begun to cooperate informally with various N.A.E. agencies and channels, probably their Sunday school commission and their Evangelical Foreign Mission Association.—*General Conference Minutes*, 1948, 30.

22. *General Conference Minutes*, 1948, 30.

23. For instance, the Pennsylvania minister Luke L. Keefer Sr. later admitted he opposed joining N.A.E. because the organization did not hold to the church's doctrine of nonconformity. See Luke L. Keefer Sr., *No Empty Dream: My Psalm of Life* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1990), 157. For "strongly debated," see Diary, June 10, 1949, C. N. Hostetter Jr. Papers, MG 7–23.1, Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).

24. On the "conscientious and worthy difference of opinion," see *General Conference Minutes*, 1949, 32. The results of the vote are recorded in Diary, June 10, 1949, C. N. Hostetter Jr. Papers.

fellowship. In turn, N.A.E. leaders sometimes visited Brethren in Christ congregations and spoke at church gatherings.[25] Eventually, Brethren in Christ bishops and ministers even assumed leadership roles in the N.A.E., the most significant being the minister and Bible college president Arthur Climenhaga, who became N.A.E. executive director in 1964.[26]

Without a doubt, the N.A.E. connected an elite group of Brethren in Christ leaders to the burgeoning neo-evangelical movement. Another organization, Youth for Christ (Y.F.C.), galvanized leaders and laypeople alike. Y.F.C. emerged in the mid-1940s as a network of weekly youth rallies and revival services held in cities and towns across North America. It fused an emergent, secular youth culture with born-again Christianity, promising teenagers, in the words of the scholar Thomas Bergler, that they could "have fun, be popular, and save the world at the same time."[27] By 1946, Y.F.C. had established some 900 rallies across North America, with an estimated combined attendance of one million young people.[28]

Many Brethren in Christ members and leaders used Y.F.C. as a venue for broadened ministry. Individual congregations participated in local and national Y.F.C. events and invited Y.F.C. speakers into their sanctuaries.[29] An Oregon minister served as an area Y.F.C. coordinator in addition to his pastoral duties, while a California bishop sat on the board

25. See, for instance, Leroy B. Walters, "The NAE Convention," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 25, 1953, 2; C. N. Hostetter Jr., "NAE and the Church," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 16, 1958, 2; and John N. Hostetter, "NAE—NHA," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 5, 1958, 2. The denomination also appointed a leader (often a bishop) to represent the church at the N.A.E.'s annual convention. For N.A.E. speakers in local Brethren in Christ congregations, see Mrs. A. E. C., "Franklin Corners, Morrison, Ill.," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 18, 1954, 13; "Franklin County Missionary Conference," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 7, 1956, 12.

26. On Climenhaga, see Harvey R. Sider, *Casting a Long Shadow: A Biography of Arthur Merlin Climenhaga* (Grantham, Pa.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2004), 111-127. For more on Brethren in Christ leaders in N.A.E., see E. Morris Sider, *Messenger of Grace: A Biography of C. N. Hostetter, Jr.* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1980), 217-221; Frances L. Harmon, *For Christ and the Church: A Biography of Alvin C. Burkholder* (Grantham, Pa.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1995), 113-114; and E. Morris Sider, *Leaders Among Brethren: Biographies of Henry A. Ginder and Charlie B. Byers* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1987), 130.

27. Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), 148. For more on Y.F.C., see ibid, 147-175; and Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 161-176.

28. "Youth for Christ Expands in Continent," *United Evangelical Action*, Jan. 1, 1946, 9, quoted in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 167.

29. "Heise Hill (Markham District)," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 7, 1953, 12; "God Did It! Revival at Hollowell," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 21, 1953, 9-10; Harold M. Wolgemuth, "Orlando, Florida," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 26, 1954, 10; "Springfield, Ohio," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 16, 1954, 12; "Elizabethtown, Pa.," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 31, 1955, 11; Carl J. Carlson and Staff, "Chicago Mission," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 28, 1955, 12-13; G. M. L., "Carlisle, Pa.," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 13, 1956, 13; Mrs. H. L., "Palmyra, Pa.," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 27, 1956, 13; and S. R. L., "Fairland Congregation, Cleona, Pa.," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 18, 1956, 13.

of his local chapter.[30] At the denominational level, leaders endorsed congregational and individual participation in Y.F.C., and recommended the organization's programs as a model for outreach to young people.[31] Moreover, many leaders participated in national and international Y.F.C. events.[32]

The Brethren in Christ's closest tie to Y.F.C. came through Samuel F. Wolgemuth, a minister and bishop in southern Pennsylvania in the 1930s and 1940s. After first encountering Y.F.C. in 1949 while taking summer courses at the fundamentalist Winona Lake School of Theology, Wolgemuth resigned his denominational posts in 1952 to join the work of Y.F.C. in Japan. In 1955 he returned to the States and held a number of positions within the North American branch of the organization, ultimately serving as its president from 1965 to 1973. Even so, Wolgemuth retained ties to his natal church community, serving on several boards and committees. As such, he provided a vital link between the Brethren in Christ and Y.F.C.[33]

Opting for the Mainstream

But connections to the National Association of Evangelicals and Youth for Christ did more than tie the Brethren in Christ to a postwar religious boom. For some members of this small religious community, neo-evangelicalism provided a rationale—if not a justification—for an accelerated move into the North American cultural mainstream. This rationale stressed the religious primacy of evangelism and conversionist faith over obedience to tradition, elements that had historically been held

30. Mrs. G. D., "Grants Pass, Oregon," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 8, 1952, 12; Myron Lady, "Jesse F. Lady: A Loyal Churchman in a Time of Transition," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 18, no. 1 (April 1995), 32.

31. Warren J. Sherman, "The Pastor's Relation to Youth Organizations," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 20, 1950, 5; and P. W. McBeth, "Building the Church Through Young People," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 18, 1952, 4.

32. Norman A. Wingert, "Irish Fires," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 29, 1952, 5, 13-14; John N. Hostetter, "The Call of the Orient" and "Assembling in Tokyo," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 3, 1953, 3; Henry Ginder, "Travelogue," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 31, 1953, 2; Eber Dourte, "Chicago to Vancouver," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 31, 1953, 2; Erwin W. Thomas, "My Impressions," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 31, 1953, 2-3; J.N.H., "Assembled in Tokyo, Japan," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 31, 1953, 3; Henry A. Ginder, "World Congress Impressions," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 31, 1953, 3; Charles and Kathryn Engle, "We Go to Tokyo," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 31, 1953, 4; J.N.H., "Front Lines," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 31, 1953, 4-5; and Henry A. Ginder, "Witness to the Resurrection," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 8, 1968, 4-5.

33. Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, "Understanding *The Activist Impulse*: A Review Essay," History of Christianity (blog), http://www.churchhistory.org/blogs/blog/understanding-the-activist-impulse-a-review-essay/; Mel Larson, "From Auto Parts to Uttermost Parts," *Youth for Christ Magazine*, March 1958, 12-13; Barbara H. Kuehn, "The Wolgemuths: Just 'Plain People' in a Mad, Mod World," *Taylor University Alumni Magazine*, Winter 1971, 24-27.

together within the Brethren in Christ experience.[34] The community's adoption of an evangelical identity altered that historical precedent. To win converts, some Brethren in Christ believed that they needed to re-evaluate certain aspects of their religious practice and present a more culturally relevant witness modeled after their fellow neo-evangelicals. With processes of acculturation already underway within the church, neo-evangelicalism offered a paradigm for being, as the Brethren in Christ often said, "in the world but not of it."

Nowhere is the assimilative power of neo-evangelicalism more evident than in the institutional changes made within the Brethren in Christ community as a result of N.A.E. participation. After days of fellowship with success-oriented and culturally conversant religious entrepreneurs, Brethren in Christ delegates to the 1950 N.A.E. convention in Indianapolis gathered for discernment. Together, they confessed concerns about "legalism," a word they used to describe their own church hierarchy's rigid enforcement of traditional practices of nonconformity and nonresistance.[35]

This conversation set in motion a series of events that transformed the small religious community.[36] One outcome was the Church Review and Study Committee, a task force appointed by the General Conference in June 1950 to study the "state, function, and work of the general church" and to make recommendations on necessary changes in church life.[37] Half of the committee's twelve members had participated in the 1950 N.A.E. meeting.[38] Between 1951 and 1961, the committee brought to the General Conference a series of recommendations that altered the church's previous positions on numerous practices of nonconformity and

34. For a treatment of the social character of Brethren in Christ thought and practice, see Alderfer, "The Mind of the Brethren in Christ."

35. For the first public invocation of "legalism," see John N. Hostetter, "The Holy Ghost and Us," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 12, 1950, 3-6. Subsequent generations referred to the years between 1930 and 1950 as an "age of legalism" within the Brethren in Christ Church. For a rhetorical assessment of this term's invocation and its role in shaping postwar Brethren in Christ religious identity, see Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, "Between Legalism and Liberalism: The Brethren in Christ Construct a New (Evangelical) Identity, 1945-1965," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 34, no. 3 (Dec. 2011), 347-386. One church leader later described this legalism in writing: "[The Brethren in Christ told] converts that they were welcome to join [but only] if they would 'conform and be one of us'" in dress and other matters. See Charlie B. Byers, "The Brethren in Christ Church in My Lifetime," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 2, no. 1 (June 1979), 24.

36. For more on this gathering, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 479-481, and J. Norman Hostetter, *Challenging Tradition, Finding a Ministry: John and Nellie Hostetter in the Brethren in Christ Church* (Grantham, Pa.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1998), 109-111.

37. *General Conference Minutes*, 1950, 31.

38. On the connection between the late-night gathering at the N.A.E. convention and the Church Review and Study Committee, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 479-481, and Hostetter, *Challenging Tradition*, 109-114.

nonresistance, including but not limited to the elimination of the proscribed church uniform of plain dress and the removal of the church's ban on military service.[39] The General Conference adopted virtually all the committee's proposals.[40]

In conducting the work of the Church Review and Study Committee, leaders saw themselves as moving the Brethren in Christ away from a legalistic focus on rules and toward a more dynamic spirituality that reflected the religious enthusiasm they had observed in their neo-evangelical co-religionists. Yet these actions also accelerated a process by which Brethren in Christ people came to look, sound, work, and worship more like their neighbors, religious and nonreligious alike. Most importantly, in explaining the impetus for these changes, leaders often pointed to the late-night gathering at the 1950 N.A.E. convention.[41]

While N.A.E. participation contributed to broad transformations in corporate religious practice, individual Brethren in Christ members involved with neo-evangelical organizations also experienced change. For Ruth Dourte, the wife of a pastor in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, neo-evangelicalism offered a way to be Brethren in Christ without the burdens of certain church traditions. In 1953, she reported in the *Evangelical Visitor* that participation in a Y.F.C. event had sparked revival at her church, energizing laypeople and drawing new converts.[42] In addition, Dourte's use of techniques from the fundamentalist-born Child Evangelism Fellowship program filled the church's Sunday school classes and, as a result, the worship service as well.[43] In a late-in-life memoir, Dourte recalled how this influx of new converts, unfamiliar with Brethren in Christ convention, prompted her to express "Brethren modesty" in ways that did not necessitate plain dress. By ceasing to wear the traditional cape dress and covering Dourte could, in her own words, place "following Christ and spreading the Gospel . . . as [my] most important priorities."[44]

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39. These two items had been among the more controversial efforts by the General Conference to confront modernization in lifestyle and practice among the diversifying Brethren in Christ community of the 1930s and 1940.

40. For extensive treatment of the work of the Church Review and Study Committee, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 483-489.

41. For examples, see Byers, "Brethren in Christ Church in My Lifetime"; Henry A. Ginder, "Decades of Transition," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 2, no. 1 (June 1979), 28-36; and Paul W. McBeth, *20th Century Tentmaker: Autobiography* (Chambersburg, Pa.: McBeth Corporation, 1986), 96.

42. "God Did It! Revival at Hollowell," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 21, 1953, 9-10.

43. Ruth Myers Dourte, "Reflections of an Octogenarian," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 33, no. 2 (Aug. 2010), 336. For background on Child Evangelism Fellowship, see Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, s.v. "Child Evangelism Fellowship" (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2004), 153.

44. Ruth Dourte, "Letting Go of Appearances," *In Part*, Fall 2013, 3.

For Dourte, as for other Brethren in Christ, neo-evangelicalism provided a framework by which to sort out ethnic conventions from biblical convictions.[45]

Yet not all church members welcomed the neo-evangelical-inspired changes to Brethren in Christ life and thought. Some criticized these transformations as compromise moves made in order to better resemble other churches, and personally and corporately defended longstanding practices of nonconformity and nonresistance. One Lancaster County woman decried her bishop's suggestion that she "be charitable in accepting some changes which must come for growth," since she believed that altering nonconformist practice compromised her witness to non-Christians.[46] Another Pennsylvania layperson condemned the church's new stance on nonconformity as "welcom[ing] disobedience into the church of Christ," and vowed to teach his daughters that wearing jewelry was a sin.[47] One rural Pennsylvania congregation, in response to a mid-1950s church publication that intentionally did not lay out behavioral expectations arising from church doctrine, published a flier outlining an "additional word of suggestion and counsel." In it, congregational leaders prescribed practices for members regarding plain dress, including an expected head covering for women, as well as bans on attending movies, carnivals, and other events.[48] In opposing change, these leaders and laypeople also opposed the mainstreaming influence of neo-evangelicalism.

The National Association of Evangelicals affiliation and the encounter with fellow neo-evangelicals had other effects on the Brethren in Christ, including accelerating and legitimizing the process of politicization already at work within the community. As a consequence of the church's doctrine of nonresistance, most Brethren in Christ avoided political involvements well into the twentieth century. But those church members moving beyond the ethnic enclave began to view voting and other activities as commonplace, even obligatory. N.A.E. affiliation accelerated this process. At an institutional level, involvement with N.A.E. meant that

45. For more on the Dourtes' attraction to neo-evangelical spirituality, their involvement with neo-evangelical institutions, and the transformative impact of it all, see Dourte, "Reflections," 335-336.

46. Emma Etterline to Henry N. Hostetter, March 5, 1952, Henry N. Hostetter Papers, MG 13 – 3.10, Folder "General Correspondences," Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).

47. Robert Dagen to C. N. Hostetter Jr., March 25, 1963, C. N. Hostetter, Jr. Papers, MG 7 – 22.1, Folder "Correspondence (A-H), 1960-1963," Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).

48. [Free Grace Church Board] to "Brethren and Sisters in the Lord at Free Grace Church," undated, Free Grace (Millersburg, Pa.) Collection, Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives.

the Brethren in Christ now engaged in political lobbying efforts.[49] If church leaders resisted such lobbying, they left no apparent documentation of their dissent. Among laity, as the historian David Weaver-Zercher has pointed out, the N.A.E. influenced politicization to the extent that articles from its *United Evangelical Action* magazine and year-end "Religion in Review" report were often reprinted in the pages of the *Evangelical Visitor*.[50] Ultimately, as the historians E. Morris Sider and Martin H. Schrag have asserted, joining N.A.E. and participating in the wider neo-evangelical world made Brethren in Christ "more aware of their citizenship" in both the U.S. and Canada.[51] In time, demographers documented a marked increase in Brethren in Christ political participation.[52] Some historians have observed that politicization heightened anti-communist and nationalistic sentiment among some Brethren in Christ, and on occasion this rhetoric seemed to conflict with the doctrine of nonresistance.[53] While far from being the sole cause of these changes, participation in the neo-evangelical subculture evidently offered religious justification for attitudes and actions traditionally eschewed by the church.

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49. Early N.A.E. lobbying efforts concentrated on government regulation of radio airwaves, so that conservative Protestants could gain access to equal amounts of airtime as liberal Protestants and secular entertainers. See Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15-18; and Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 112-141.

50. David Zercher, "Opting for the Mainstream: The Brethren Join the National Association of Evangelicals," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 10, no. 1 (April 1987), 58-59.

51. Martin H. Schrag and E. Morris Sider, "The Heritage of the Brethren in Christ: Attitudes Toward Involvement in Public Policy," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 12, no. 3 (Dec. 1989), 207. For a generalized survey of other factors inclining Brethren in Christ toward greater political participation, see ibid., 206-208.

52. For instance, in a 1972 study of five Anabaptist denominations, 79 percent of Brethren in Christ affirmed this statement: "Members of our denomination should vote in public elections for state, provincial, and national offices." Sixteen percent of respondents were uncertain, and only 6 percent disagreed. In much the same way, a 1975 survey of 95 ministers revealed that 75 percent of the respondents voted in national elections. While prior data does not exist, these numbers suggest a sharp rise in the number of Brethren in Christ encouraging or practicing political participation in the form of voting. See J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1975), 161; and Mark Charlton, "Political Activism Among Brethren in Christ Ministers," unpublished paper written at the University of Western Ontario, 1975, RG IX—Academic Documents, Box 1-1.14, Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).

53. See Zercher, "Opting for the Mainstream," 63-65. For examples of anti-communist sentiment among Brethren in Christ, see John N. Hostetter, "At the Crossroads," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 1, 1950, 3; Albert Engle, "New York City, One of the World's Great Mission Fields," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 15, 1954, 8; Samuel F. Wolgemuth, "Today's Task," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 17, 1955, 3. For examples of heightened nationalistic sentiment among Brethren in Christ, see Mr. and Mrs. J. I. M., "Letters to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 30, 1956, 2.

Pursuing Peace and Retaining Nonconformity

Yet even as involvement with fellow neo-evangelicals accelerated processes of sociocultural assimilation and politicization already at work within their community, a select group of Brethren in Christ used neo-evangelical venues and resources to strengthen their commitments to nonresistance and nonconformity. Several bishops and ministers saw themselves as witnesses among evangelicals, advancing a theological critique of war and of Christian nationalism. Other leaders drew on evangelical resources in order to retain select nonconformist practices despite social integration.

Among Brethren in Christ leaders, one of the strongest opponents of war and nationalism was C. N. Hostetter Jr., a Pennsylvania minister, Bible college president, and chairman of Mennonite Central Committee (M.C.C.). Hostetter began attending N.A.E. conventions in the late 1940s and eventually rose to leadership roles with the organization. Though he often praised the N.A.E. for its vitalizing role among Brethren in Christ leaders and laypeople,[54] Hostetter balked at the nationalism and militarism he encountered in the N.A.E. "The inclination of evangelicals," he wrote in 1954 to the evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry, "is to take for granted that the Bible approves participation in war and [to] classify all opposition to [war] as identified with the pacifism espoused by liberals. The evangelical fellowship should be better informed."[55] As the historians E. Morris Sider and Perry Bush have shown, in the 1950s and early 1960s Hostetter joined other Anabaptists in dialogue with neo-evangelicals on the peace issue.[56]

Hostetter's most successful effort at dialogue came at the 1955 N.A.E. convention, when he delivered a speech on biblical nonresistance that audience members later described as "masterful" and "well received." The address was subsequently published in both the N.A.E. journal *United Evangelical Action* and the *Evangelical Visitor*.[57] But Hostetter found less success in his effort to co-sponsor (with the Mennonite theologian Guy

54. C. N. Hostetter Jr., "NAE and the Church."

55. C. N. Hostetter Jr., to Carl F. H. Henry, Dec. 14, 1954, quoted in Sider, *Messenger of Grace*, 212.

56. See Sider, *Messenger of Grace*, 210-217; and Perry Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again: Mennonites, New Evangelicals, and the Search for a Usable Past, 1950-1980," *Fides et Historia* 25 (Winter-Spring 1993), 33-35. It must be understood that Hostetter's "witness" to neo-evangelicals occurred within the context of a much larger Anabaptist-Mennonite effort to engage neo-evangelicals on peace issues in the 1950s and early 1960s. For this context, see Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again," 32-37; and Molly Worthen, "Billy Graham and the Fracture of American Evangelicalism," *The Christian Century* Then & Now blog (online), accessed July 7, 2014, https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2013-11/billy-graham-and-fracture-american-evangelicalism.

57. This story is recounted in Sider, *Messenger of Grace*, 212-213.

Hershberger and others) a panel on "Christians and Military Service" at the 1960 N.A.E. convention; only four non-Anabaptists attended.[58] In much the same way, Hostetter's efforts to organize a 1961 meeting between Mennonite and Brethren in Christ leaders and the neo-evangelical leader Billy Graham produced mixed results. After a thoroughgoing conversation on Anabaptist theology and its contemporary relevance to evangelicals, Graham declared himself in "ninety-nine percent" agreement. And yet despite the persistence of Hostetter and others, future conversations between Graham and these Anabaptists failed to materialize.[59]

As some Mennonites and Brethren in Christ grew discouraged with the uninterest of neo-evangelicals in their peace message, Hostetter—who held clout with Anabaptists by virtue of his role with M.C.C.—emphasized the importance of continued dialogue. He urged peace groups not to withdraw from N.A.E., believing they "have an obligation to the Christian world that we cannot afford to miss by too much abnegation."[60] But for Hostetter, this obligation required more than just conversation. To that end, in the 1950s and 1960s, he used his position as chairman of the N.A.E.'s World Relief Commission to establish a cooperative partnership with M.C.C.[61] As Hostetter's biographer E. Morris Sider has pointed out, this partnership had numerous benefits. Mennonite Central Committee's cooperation with the World Relief Commission "gave some assurance to the more conservative, evangelical wing of the Mennonite constituency" that M.C.C. could partner with groups other than the liberal Protestant World Council of Churches. Meanwhile, by using some of M.C.C.'s well-established aid channels, the World Relief Commission expanded its relief program.[62] Thus, for Hostetter, witnessing to his fellow neo-evangelicals involved both confrontation and collaboration, activities he pursued until his retirement in the mid-1960s.

Even as Hostetter and others witnessed to their co-religionists on peace, some Brethren in Christ leaders drew on neo-evangelical resources to help reinforce certain principles related to the doctrine of nonconformity. Like

58. Ibid., 214-215.

59. Ibid., 216-217.

60. C. N. Hostetter Jr. to John Howard Yoder, Jan. 19, 1960, quoted in ibid., 216.

61. Hostetter served as chair of the World Relief Commission from 1959-1967. For more on his work in this role, see Sider, *Messenger of Grace*, 217-221.

62. Quotation from Sider, *Messenger of Grace*, 218. For more on the mutually beneficial partnership between M.C.C. and the World Relief Commission facilitated by Hostetter, see ibid., 218-219. For a history of the World Relief Commission, see Miles Mullin III, "Shall We Let Them Die?: Postwar Evangelicalism and Global Social Ministry," *Fides et Historia* 42, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014), 40-57.

the Brethren in Christ, many Protestant groups in the neo-evangelical movement endorsed a version of religious separatism, urging the rejection of individual vices such as dancing, gambling, and premarital sex.[63] Yet unlike the Brethren in Christ, who proscribed specific practices to ensure personal holiness, other Protestants tended to spiritualize separatism. An article in the neo-evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, for instance, argued that separation should entail the embodiment of certain principles, including "attractiveness, understanding, kindness, and good fellowship," rather than "extreme asceticism in dress and manner."[64] Even so, Brethren in Christ leaders often appropriated the resources of their fellow neo-evangelicals to bolster the doctrine of nonconformity.

Leaders especially sought to perpetuate nonconformity's underlying principles in the face of changing practices.[65] As the Church Review and Study Committee and certain neo-evangelical involvements accelerated patterns of social acculturation among the Brethren in Christ, the minister Arthur Climenhaga argued, "We must come to understand the principles underlying [our] ordinances and adopt them to the age in which we live."[66] Even so, for a community as traditional as the Brethren in Christ, communicating the principle of biblical modesty without resorting to injunctions about plain dress often proved vexing. To some, the ideas of fellow neo-evangelicals offered a useful model.

In multiple instances, the New York minister and *Evangelical Visitor* editor John N. Hostetter reprinted articles and sermons by neo-evangelicals in the church periodical. In so doing, he brought outside voices to bear on community discussions. Moreover, he transformed non-Brethren in Christ writings on modesty and separation into endorsements of nonconformist principles without recourse to specific practices.[67] Other

63. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 57-64; Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, 157-166; D. G. Hart, *The Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 69-83.

64. L. David Cowie, "What is Christian Separation?" *Christianity Today*, Nov. 11, 1957, 15.

65. For instance, a late 1950s General Conference statement proposing changes to the proscribed style of women's head coverings emphasized the necessity of maintaining principles rather than proscriptions. Since the "form of head covering for the woman is not specifically prescribed in Scripture," the statement urged leaders and members alike to "seek primarily to promote commitment to *principle*. . . . Loyalty to the *principles* taught in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 must rest ultimately upon a clear understanding of and personal commitment to the Word of God." See General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church, "Statement of Position on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16" (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1959), 1. Emphasis mine.

66. Quoted in John E. Zercher, "Maintaining Our Sense of Direction: Report on a Sermon by Arthur Climenhaga," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 1, 1954, 11.

67. See for instance Bob Cook, "Modern Yet Modest," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 30, 1956, 10, 16; Vance Havner, "Why Not a Word to the Worldly?" *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 26, 1957, 4-5; and Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Separation," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 22, 1967, 2.

Brethren in Christ leaders appropriated neo-evangelical ideas on nonconformity in their own writings and sermons. For example, a 1962 article by Arthur Climenhaga offered readers guidelines for navigating "questionable" matters of individual morality such as dancing, watching movies, or playing cards. In making his case, he drew extensively on a booklet by the British evangelical leader Frederick P. Wood. As referenced by Climenhaga, Wood offered three questions to guide discernment: "[N]ot 'Is it wrong?' but 'Is it the best?'; not 'Is it lawful?' but 'Is it advisable?'; [and] not 'Is it inherently evil?' but 'Is it to the glory of God?'"[68] These questions, Climenhaga argued in an appeal to his Brethren in Christ readership, provide "certain definite tests which can be applied to every questionable thing."[69] Thus he concluded that Christians should avoid card playing because it cannot glorify God, and that they should shun dancing because "fascination of the dance is so strong as to cause so many to choose it in preference to Christ."[70] These positions reflected Brethren in Christ tradition, yet framed religious practice in neo-evangelical language.

For these ministers and bishops, framing nonconformity in neo-evangelical language enabled a focus on principles, rather than proscribed practices. Moreover, leaders believed that such framing encouraged laypeople to see distinctiveness as irenic, not sectarian. "Certain recognized evangelical leaders of this period have said that the emphasis of churches like ours is much needed at this time," boasted Canadian minister Edward Gilmore to a Brethren in Christ audience at the General Conference of 1954. "We do not need to be apologetic because [we] . . . are distinctive and different," he concluded.[71]

As Gilmore's comments suggest, in the 1950s and early 1960s the Brethren in Christ intentionally cultivated an evangelical identity and contributed to the formation of a transdenominational coalition of born-again Protestants. This evangelical identity enabled the Brethren in Christ to make sense of social changes and to resolve intragroup conflict. It legitimized some cultural assimilation and politicization that had once been anathema to the group's religious practice. At the same time, this identity allowed for and even fostered the maintenance of what some

68. Arthur M. Climenhaga, "The Question of the Questionable [Part I]," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 8, 1962, 4. Wood's booklet is "The Question of Worldliness" (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1955). On Wood, see Mark W. Cannister, "Youth Ministry Pioneers of the 20th Century, Par I: Frederick & Arthur Wood, Lloyd Bryant, Percy Crawford, and Evelyn McClusky," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2003), 66-72.

69. Climenhaga, "Questionable [Part I]," 3.

70. Arthur M. Climenhaga, "The Question of the Questionable [Part II]," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 5, 1962, 4.

71. Edward Gilmore, "Serving Our Generation," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 7, 1954, 5.

Brethren in Christ saw as important differences between themselves and other Protestants, shoring up religious expressions of nonresistance and nonconformity at a time of social transition.

A Broadened Social Conscience

By the mid-1960s, patterns of acculturation and politicization had drawn the Brethren in Christ further out of the ethnic enclave. As a result, they experienced alongside their North American neighbors the escalating war in Vietnam, the tumult of the civil rights movement, and the provocations of the counterculture revolution. Many, perhaps most, confronted these social convulsions with the longstanding conservative Protestant solution of Christian conversion.[72] Most also saw charity and benevolence as necessary responses to social ills, giving generously toward relief and development through M.C.C. and other such agencies.[73]

Yet a few Brethren in Christ adopted a more radical approach. Shaped by politicization, the broadening influence of higher education, and service experiences outside North America, this vocal minority began to articulate a nuanced understanding of the social dimensions of the Christian faith. They critiqued the systemic injustices of racism, sexism, and unchecked consumerism. They called their white, suburban, middle-class co-religionists to self-sacrificial service and to patterns of generosity and simplicity. And they condemned American militarism and nationalism, sometimes staging protest marches and practicing war tax resistance. Advocates of such social action tended to be younger church leaders and laypeople who had come of age amid the changes to Brethren in Christ religious practice and polity wrought by the Church Review and Study Committee and by growing affiliation with fellow neo-evangelicals. Their provocations reflected the fervor of their times. Yet these young people distinguished their concern from New Left dogma and the liberal Protestant social gospel. Instead, they connected the once-sectarian

72. For Brethren in Christ voices on conversion to Christian faith as the sole solution to social issues, see [Arthur Climenhaga], "Heard in Minneapolis," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 24, 1965, 2; J. N. Hostetter, "Today's Reading," *Evangelical Visitor*, Nov. 22, 1965, 2; J. N. Hostetter, "Christian Concern," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 3, 1967, 2; Henry A. Ginder, "What Did the [U.S.] Congress [on Evangelism] Say to the Brethren in Christ?" *Evangelical Visitor*, Oct. 20, 1969, 4-5; John Hawbaker, "Where Should the Church Stand?" April 10, 1970, 6. On this attitude among neo-evangelicals, see Carpenter, 116-119, and Jean Miller Schmidt, "Reforming the Nation by Reforming the Individual," part one of *Souls or the Social Order: The Two-Party System in American Protestantism* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1991).

73. By the 1930s and 1940s, such charitable giving had become an aspect of the church's practice of nonresistance. For more, see Heisey, *Peace and Persistence*, 97-111.

impulses of nonconformity and nonresistance with active engagement with the larger world.[74]

To be fair, few Brethren in Christ in the late 1960s and 1970s used the term nonconformity. Instead, younger Brethren in Christ articulated a vision of the "separated lifestyle," by which they meant a "radical break with the social-economic, and even ecclesiastical structures" of mainstream North American society, as one observer put it.[75] While perhaps reflective of the ideology of the secular counterculture movement, young Brethren in Christ cast their emphasis on living simply in distinctly religious language. Articles in the *Evangelical Visitor* and elsewhere argued that Christians should affirm the "lordship of Christ" in all areas of life, a theological paradigm they borrowed from Mennonite intellectuals.[76] Such a commitment, they believed, would produce a more biblical vision of nonconformity, one focused not only on avoiding individual vices such as dancing, drinking alcohol, or watching movies, but also on repudiating systemic sins such as racism, materialism, nationalism, and economic injustices.[77] Writers urged their fellow church members to embrace the lordship of Christ over partisan politics and military preparedness; to reject the creature comforts of suburbia for self-sacrificial service in urban slums and the Global South; and to simplify patterns of consumption in order to share more generously with the poor and the oppressed.[78]

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74. Similar patterns of transforming nonconformity and nonresistance were at work among certain Mennonite groups in the post–World War II years. See Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again," 29-32; Ervin R. Stutzman, *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908-2008* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press, 2011); and Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987), 317-329.

75. John E. Zercher, "Fellowship in the Gospel," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 25, 1972, 3.

76. On the "lordship of Christ" as articulated by Mennonite intellectuals, see Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again," 30-31; and Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1994), 121-124. For use in a Brethren in Christ context, see Joseph Haines, "Evangelism's Three Faces," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 10, 1975, 4-5.

77. John K. Stoner, "Separation," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 3, 1968, 5, 12; John K. Stoner, "The Biblical Concept of Sin," *Evangelical Visitor*, Oct. 20, 1969, 5, 7; John E. Zercher, "God's Springtime," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 29, 1969, 2; Ron Sider, "Is Racism as Sinful as Adultery?" *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 25, 1971, 5-6; John K. Stoner, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Oct. 10, 1972, 5.

78. Jerry Zook, "The Church and the Urban Crisis: What Can Be Done?" *Evangelical Visitor*, June 7, 1968, 11; John K. Stoner, "Caesar and God," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 1, 1969, 11; Sider, "Is Racism as Sinful as Adultery?"; Ronald J. Sider, "The Graduated Tithe," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 10, 1972, 6-7; John E. Zercher, "The Test of Divine Love," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 25, 1973, 3; Ronald J. Sider, "The Empty Tomb and the Missionary Message," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 10, 1973, 4-5, 11; Brethren in Christ Mission Board, "Issues '74—Hunger," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 25, 1974, 8, 10; Leonard Chester, "Christian Lifestyle Conference," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 25, 1974, 12; Bob Knapp, "Lessons from the Recession,"

As they did with nonconformity, young Brethren in Christ in the late 1960s and 1970s often framed nonresistance as a countercultural imperative for Christians. In these years, many Brethren in Christ continued to articulate a traditional understanding of nonresistance as a refusal to serve in the military, a position taken by the many Brethren in Christ men who responded to the Vietnam War draft by claiming conscientious objector status.[79] Likewise, traditional understandings of nonresistance as active, rather than passive, dominated church discourse and practice. Many conscientious objectors during the Vietnam era chose to discharge their Selective Service obligation either through wage-earning 1-W alternate service work projects or through unpaid assignments with Mennonite Central Committee or the Voluntary Service Program administered by the Brethren in Christ.[80]

Nevertheless, new dimensions of nonresistant thought and practice emerged during this era. Some Brethren in Christ expanded their understanding of nonresistance to include opposition to other forms of state-sanctioned violence, including capital punishment.[81] Similarly, many church leaders and laypeople incorporated political involvement into their understanding of nonresistant practice. While older understandings of nonresistance forbade political involvement because the Brethren in Christ perceived politics as essentially coercive in nature, the understanding of nonresistance emerging among Brethren in Christ in the mid-1960s and 1970s emphasized witnessing to government through participation in letter-writing campaigns, public advocacy for and against particular pieces of legislation, and even lobbying Congress and

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Evangelical Visitor, March 10, 1975, 16; Mark H. Keller, "Letter to the Editor: Consuming More and More," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 10, 1979, 5. Of course, the Brethren in Christ were not alone in their attention to matters of lifestyle; other evangelicals also used this language in the 1970s and beyond to describe their concern with avoiding conspicuous consumption and gross materialism in order to share resources wisely and biblically. See Ronald J. Sider, ed., *Lifestyle in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982). Yet as I argue elsewhere in this article, Anabaptist—and specifically Brethren in Christ—voices such as that of Ronald J. Sider called evangelicals to embrace simple living as part of their social engagement. Thus, the Brethren in Christ concern for separated lifestyle in some ways pre-dates a similar concern among evangelicals.

79. For more on Brethren in Christ conscientious objection during the Vietnam War era, see the reports of the Peace, Relief, and Service Commission in *General Conference Minutes*, 1959-1969; reports of the Director of Christian Service Ministries in *General Conference Minutes*, 1970-1973; Leroy Walters Jr., "The Viet Nam Situation: An Open Letter to the Brotherhood," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 27, 1966, 19-20; and J. Wilmer Heisey, "The Military Draft: Alive and Well," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 25, 1972, 10-11.

80. On Brethren in Christ men in 1-W alternate service during the Vietnam War, and on the Voluntary Service program, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 529.

81. Glen Heise, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 10, 1972, 6; Mary Beth Stoner, "Letter to the Editor: Jesus and Capital Punishment," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 10, 1979, 5.

Parliament.[82] A small minority chose to witness in a still more radical fashion, borrowing from the secular left as they opposed the Vietnam War and the proliferation of nuclear weapons through protest marches and other forms of nonviolent direct action.[83] Some even practiced war tax resistance.[84] Moreover, many Brethren in Christ joined with Mennonites and Quakers in voicing active opposition to militarism as a matter of American and Canadian foreign policy and national defense.[85] However, unlike the Mennonites who transformed nonresistant practice to include civil disobedience, noncooperation with the draft, and other symbolic actions, few if any Brethren in Christ engaged in such forms of activism.[86]

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82. The Kauffman/Harder survey of five Anabaptist denominations in the 1970s located the Brethren in Christ "in the middle" of the political participation scale, with 57 percent agreeing that "church members should witness directly to the state (nation) by writing to legislators, testifying before legislative committees, etc.," and 79 percent agreeing that "members of our denomination should vote in public elections for state, provincial, and national offices." See Kauffman and Harder, 160-161. One example of this kind of activity was Brethren in Christ minister John Stoner's participation in a 1972 delegation of Anabaptists representing the M.C.C. Peace Section, who delivered a "Declaration of Conscience" against the War in Vietnam to congressional representatives. For more, see Driedger and Kraybill, 128. For other examples of Brethren in Christ thinking on political participation, see "Church, War, and Respect for Human Life," *General Conference Minutes*, 1976, 100-107; J. Ralph Wenger, "Three Days in Washington," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 10, 1970, 6; John E. Zercher, "On Loving One's Neighbor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Nov. 10, 1975, 3, 7; Warren Hoffman, "Lord Jesus, Please Solve This Sewage Mess," *Evangelical Visitor*, Nov. 25, 1975, 6-7; Harriet Bicksler, "Fortunate Are Those Who Work for Peace," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 10, 1978, 10-11; and Harriet Sider Bicksler, "Letter to the Editor: In Whom Do We Trust?" *Evangelical Visitor*, June 25, 1979, 2, 5, 7.

83. On protests against the Vietnam War, see Paul W. Nisly, *Shared Faith, Bold Vision, Enduring Promise: The Maturing Years of Messiah College* (Grantham, Pa.: Messiah College, 2009), 23-28; Burton Buller, "The Moratorium on War: Peaceful, Disciplined," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 15, 1969, 8, 14; Carol Brubaker, "MC–Temple Students Attend Moratorium March," *Ivy Rustles*, Oct. 27, 1969, 1; Mark Keller, "One Solemn Moment," *Ivy Rustles*, Oct. 27, 1969, 2; Ralph Stoner, "The March on Washington," *Ivy Rustles*, Nov. 24, 1969, 1; Chaplain Willms, "A Personal Reaction to the March," *Ivy Rustles*, Nov. 24, 1969, 1; Paul Heisey, "Messiah at Temple Takes Part in Washington March," *Ivy Rustles*, Dec. 16, 1969, 1. On protests against nuclear proliferation, see "Tent Dwellers Witness at Arms Show," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 10, 1979, 13.

84. John E. Zercher, "Caesar and God," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 25, 1971, 3, 16; Bicksler, "Fortunate Are Those Who Work for Peace," 10-11; John K. Stoner, "Letter to the Editor: Not as Easy as We Think," *Evangelical Visitor*, Nov. 25, 1978, 7; and Harriet Sider Bicksler, "Turning Swords into Plowshares: The World Peace Tax Fund," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 25, 1980, 6-7, 11. For a personal example of nonresistant practice as involving war tax resistance, see Mary Walters Ebersole, "Reaching for the Ideal, Embracing the Real: Harriet Alice Sider Bicksler," in *Celebrating Women's Stories: Faith Through Life's Seasons*, ed. Rebekah L. Ebersole, Dorcas I. Steckbeck, and E. Morris Sider (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 2002), 13-28.

85. "New Call to Peacemaking," *Evangelical Visitor*, Nov. 10, 1978, 16; Martin H. Schrag, "Hearing and Heeding the Call: The New Call to Peacemaking," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 25, 1978, 5-7; Larry Cornies, "Historic Peace Churches Renounce Growing Militarism," *Evangelical Visitor*, Nov. 10, 1980, 11-12.

86. On changes in the Mennonite practice of nonresistance in the 1960s and 1970s, see Driedger and Kraybill, 109-131. They note that Brethren in Christ statements on peace in 1970

At times, these progressive Brethren in Christ pointed to instances in which their nonconformist and nonresistant beliefs reflected similar convictions among evangelicals.[87] Some practiced the kind of witness to evangelicals first modeled by C. N. Hostetter Jr. a generation before.[88] And a few ministers, bishops, and church intellectuals participated in seminars and conferences aimed at finding common ground between evangelicals and Anabaptists on social issues.[89] But more often than not, these progressive Brethren in Christ critiqued evangelicals for what they perceived as nationalism, militarism, and consumerism. For instance, when the National Association of Evangelicals presented their 1969 Layman of the Year award to a military official, the church scholars Carlton Wittlinger and E. Morris Sider wrote to N.A.E. President Arnold T. Olson, demanding to know how a "constituent group [can] disassociate itself from N.A.E. statements and actions . . . which appear to be inconsistent with a basic doctrinal commitment of that group."[90] Similarly, in 1972, several Brethren in Christ criticized an N.A.E. resolution praising President Richard Nixon for his "efforts . . . to restore peace in South Asia" yet failing to mention the atrocities perpetuated by U.S. military incursion.[91] Given their peace stance, argued the Pennsylvania layperson Nancy Heisey, the Brethren in Christ ought to reconsider their involvement in the war-supporting N.A.E.[92] The Iowa layman Mark Keller was more blunt: "How can our peace-loving church belong to such a mixed up organization?"[93] In much the same way, a few Brethren in

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and 1972 are silent on the issue of draft noncooperation. A 1980 recommendation from the church's Peace and Social Concerns Commission, prepared amid concerns about a reinstated military draft, initially included language supporting those who object to and therefore choose not to participate in draft registration. The language was eventually removed from the statement and replaced with more generic language affirming "other methods of expressing personal conscience." See *General Conference Minutes*, 1980, 118.

87. Martin H. Schrag, "Billy Graham and John Stott on Nuclear Weapons," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 10, 1980, 4-5; Martin H. Schrag and John K. Stoner, *The Ministry of Reconciliation* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1973), 28, 30-31.

88. John E. Zercher, "Convention Time," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 6, 1968, 2; Eugene Wingert, "Unity in Diversity," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 24, 1969, 4; Harry Nigh, "Our Fathers' Zeal," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 5, 1967, 3-4.

89. *Evangelicals in Social Action Peace Witness Seminar: Papers* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Evangelicals in Social Action, 1967); Paul E. Hostetler, ed., *Perfect Love and War: A Dialogue on Christian Holiness and the Issues of War and Peace* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1974).

90. C. O. Wittlinger and E. Morris Sider to Dr. Arnold T. Olson, Feb.[10?], 1969, Carlton O. Wittlinger Papers, 35—1.25, Folder "N.A.E. and Militarism," Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives.

91. For a report on the resolution, see "NAE Endorses Capital Punishment and Speaks to Social Issues," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 25, 1972, 12.

92. Nancy Heisey, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 10, 1972, 6.

93. Mark N. Keller, "Letter to the Editor: NAE Mixed Up?" *Evangelical Visitor*, July 10, 1972, 6.

Christ delegates to the 1976 N.A.E. convention, disturbed by the proceedings' fusion of God-and-country rhetoric, determined to "bring to the convention a formal statement presenting the other side," until more conservative delegates talked them down.[94]

Yet even as young leaders and laypeople critiqued their fellow evangelicals, they consistently framed their approach in conservative theological terms, distinguishing themselves from secular activists and liberal Protestants. Articles on war, poverty, racism, and materialism hinged on biblical exegesis; writers invoked Christ's resurrection and authentic, experiential conversion as prerequisites to Christian social concern.[95] Brethren in Christ voices critiqued secularists for basing their social concern on leftist propaganda, and chided liberal Protestants for their naïve confidence in progress and for humanizing the Gospel.[96]

Despite their theologically conservative basis, at times these transformed patterns of nonresistance and nonconformity—and the denominational and transdenominational critiques that accompanied them—elicited sharp disapproval from church elders. Those who continued to view nonresistance as requiring respect for but not participation in government balked at progressives' activism.[97] Some also reacted strongly to new articulations of nonconformity, revealing the extent to which acculturation had ensconced the once-sectarian Brethren in Christ comfortably in the social status quo.[98] Traditionalists balked at progressives' discordant criticism of evangelicals as well.[99] As a growing

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94. Glen Pierce, "Personal Reflections on the NAE Convention," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 10, 1976, 6.

95. Sider, "Is Racism as Sinful as Adultery?"; Stoner, "Biblical Concept of Sin"; Sider, "The Empty Tomb and the Missionary Message."

96. Jean A. Hillborn, "Positive Protest," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 3, 1968, 7; John Hawbaker, "Where Should the Church Stand?"; and Arthur M. Climenhaga and John Hawbaker, "The Social Conscience of the Evangelical," *United Evangelical Action*, Winter 1970, 19-22.

97. J. N. Hostetter, "Serving Through Love: Pacifism or Peace Witness: Which?", tract published by the Brethren in Christ Church Board of Bishops and the Christian Service Ministries of the Board of Missions (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, n.d.); Mrs. Haldeman, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 25, 1973, 2; Shirley S. Craighead, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 25, 1979, 2, 5; Paul L. Snyder, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 25, 1978, 2.

98. For instance, a 1974 call by the General Conference for all Brethren in Christ to reduce their food consumption by 10 percent and contribute the amount saved to alleviate hunger and suffering through a "World Hunger Fund" elicited sharp reactions. Some thought that the call went too far, while others felt it did not go far enough. See Bert Sider, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 25, 1974, 2, and John K. Stoner, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Oct. 10, 1974, 2, for calls to even greater reduction; see Mrs. Harold Zercher, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 10, 1974, 2, and Clyde L. Hershey, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 10, 1975, 2, for resistance to the call for reduction or other lifestyle changes.

99. James W. Esh, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 10, 1972, 4; Ruth Z. Hoover, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 10, 1972, 4; William R. Garrison,

polarity emerged within the church community, *Evangelical Visitor* editor John E. Zercher pled for mutual forbearance.[100]

An Outsized Influence on the Evangelical Left

Like the Brethren in Christ, many Protestant groups during this period convulsed under the stress of dissent. As several historians have observed, by the mid-1960s the neo-evangelical project of irenic transdenominationalism had begun to fragment amid disagreements over a combination of doctrinal and political issues.[101] According to the historian George Marsden, "By the late 1970s, no one, not even Billy Graham, could claim to stand at the center of so divided a coalition."[102] Doctrinally, many evangelicals waged a new "battle for the Bible," as conservatives and progressives argued over Scripture's authority.[103] Meanwhile, the Vietnam War, race relations, and other social issues provoked divergent political responses from different wings of the evangelical constituency. Marsden has argued that entrenched "arch-conservatives . . . demanded that evangelicals take unreservedly pro-nationalist and procapitalist positions," while an emergent liberal wing "champion[ed] women's equality, pacifism, and progressive visions of social justice."[104] Thus, as the secular New Left gathered political force in American cultural life more generally, the American evangelical subculture birthed what the historian David R. Swartz has termed an Evangelical Left, an "incipient progressive movement" that stirred conservative Protestants to political action nearly a decade before the rise of the Religious Right.[105]

Early on, this Evangelical Left demonstrated a fascination with the theological traditions of Wesleyanism and Anabaptism. The Free Methodist theologian Donald W. Dayton and his wife, Lucille Sider Dayton, a scholar and the daughter of a Canadian Brethren in Christ minister, presented nineteenth-century social action among holiness Wesleyans as a usable past to legitimize calls for activism by

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"Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 10, 1973, 2; Millard Herr, "Letter to the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 25, 1979, 2.

100. Zercher, "Fellowship in the Gospel," 3.

101. George M. Marsden, "Unity and Diversity in the Evangelical Resurgence," in *Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America, 1935-1985*, eds. David W. Lotz, Donald W. Shriver Jr., and John F. Wilson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 70-71; and Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again," 42.

102. Marsden, "Unity and Diversity," 71.

103. Ibid., 70.

104. Ibid., 70-71.

105. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 1.

contemporary evangelicals.[106] Meanwhile, Mennonites and other Anabaptists enjoyed considerable attention from evangelicals. The Mennonite college president and evangelist Myron Augsburger elicited cheers from his evangelical audience at the 1970 Urbana mission conference when he condemned war as an insurmountable barrier to evangelism. Similarly, the M.C.C. worker Doris Longacre captured the attention of many evangelicals with her Mennonite-published, ethical-eating cookbook, *More with Less*, which ultimately sold nearly one million copies. Meanwhile, the theologian John Howard Yoder drew a substantial evangelical following with his 1972 magnum opus *The Politics of Jesus*, a biblical repudiation of Niebuhrian realism and evangelical nationalism.[107] Thus, as the historian Perry Bush has claimed, "after years of haphazard success in their 'witness to evangelicals' on peace and justice issues," Anabaptists were now in demand.[108]

Yet Anabaptists such as Augsburger, Longacre, and Yoder, and holiness Wesleyans such as Dayton, were not the only voices from these traditions influencing the Evangelical Left. Despite their small numbers, the Brethren in Christ played an outsized role in the emergence of this progressive movement. In fact, one of the movement's chief architects was a Brethren in Christ minister and college professor named Ronald J. Sider. Through his popular writings and his leadership of key Evangelical Left events, Sider provided what one historian has called "Anabaptism's most influential contribution to evangelicalism in the postwar era."[109] Moreover, he exponentially extended the Brethren in Christ's witness to their fellow evangelicals.

Born in Ontario, Canada, Sider was the son of a Brethren in Christ minister and the cousin of an influential bishop who often preached against the sin of voting. But Sider discarded his tradition's quietism in the 1960s, while pursuing doctoral studies at Yale University. There he encountered evangelical groups such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship that reflected the conversionist piety of his Brethren in Christ youth, but

106. See, for instance, Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Dayton and Sider Dayton, "An Historical Survey of Attitudes Toward War and Peace Within the American Holiness Movement," in *Perfect Love and War: A Dialogue on Christian Holiness and the Issues of War and Peace*, ed. Paul Hostetler (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1974), 132-152. For analysis, see Douglas M. Strong, "A Tradition of Integrated Faith," in Dayton, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2014), 19-38.

107. On Augsburger, Longacre, and Yoder, see Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again," 42, and David R. Swartz, "Re-Baptizing Evangelicalism," in *The Activist Impulse: Essays on the Intersection of Evangelicalism and Anabaptism*, eds. Jared S. Burkholder and David C. Cramer (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 264-271.

108. Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again," 42.

109. Swartz, "Re-Baptizing Evangelicalism," 273.

evidenced a more vibrant engagement with the surrounding society. Yet his day-to-day life in impoverished, segregated New Haven, Connecticut, stirred his social conscience. In time, he fused this evangelical identity with a burgeoning political leftism.

In 1968, Sider accepted an invitation from the Brethren in Christ denominational school, Messiah College, to serve as director of its new satellite campus in urban Philadelphia. There, amid racial unrest and generational poverty, Sider launched his career as an evangelical social activist.[110] In 1973, he convened the Thanksgiving Workshop of Evangelical Social Concern, a meeting at which progressive evangelicals penned a historic manifesto, the Chicago Declaration, which denounced racism, sexism, economic injustices, and militarism.[111] That manifesto, which Sider edited, concluded that evangelicals "dare no longer remain silent in the face of glaring social evil."[112] The religious and secular presses described the workshop as "the most significant church-related event of 1973."[113]

In addition to his leadership of the workshop, Sider made a name for himself within the broader evangelicalism by boldly proclaiming what the historian David Swartz has called an "anti-prosperity gospel."[114] In 1972, he penned a provocative article in InterVarsity's *HIS* magazine, condemning evangelical affluence and calling for Christians to adopt a "graduated tithe" above the traditional 10 percent as a way to alleviate global poverty.[115] Five years later, in 1977, he published *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, a book-length call to simple living.[116] *Rich Christians* offered a structural critique of global economic injustice and argued that evangelicals had profited from such injustice, lamenting, "We are guilty of an outrageous offense against God and neighbor."[117] More moral indictment than thoroughgoing economic and political treatise, *Rich Christians* nevertheless called evangelicals to lobby Congress for an end to trade barriers for Global South nations and to advocate for a foreign policy

110. For biographies of Sider, see Tim Stafford, "Ron Sider's Unsettling Crusade," *Christianity Today*, April 27, 1992, 19; Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, s.v. "Sider, Ronald J." (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2004), 625-626.

111. On the 1973 Thanksgiving Workshop and the resultant Chicago Declaration, see Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 178-184.

112. Ronald J. Sider, "An Historic Moment for Biblical Social Concern," in *The Chicago Declaration*, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1974), 25.

113. Roy Larson, "Evangelicals Do U-Turn, Take on Social Problems," *Chicago Sun-Times*, Dec. 1, 1973, quoted in Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 181.

114. "Anti-prosperity gospel" comes from Swartz, "Re-Baptizing Evangelicalism," 273.

115. Sider, "The Ministry of Affluence: A Graduated Tithe," *HIS*, Dec. 1972, 6-8.

116. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 160.

117. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 166.

designed with the poor in mind.[118] In the midst of larger secular and religious debates about global poverty, Sider's book made its mark not by calling for political action but by explicitly using the language of sin to condemn unchecked materialism and affluent passivity.[119] The book captivated its evangelical audience, ultimately selling over 350,000 copies in four editions by 1997.[120]

In proclaiming his progressive anti-prosperity gospel, Sider actively drew on his roots in the Brethren in Christ community. He credited his plain-dressing parents and a childhood rooted in the Brethren in Christ church with giving him a "distance from the culture that . . . has been a real blessing" and that had informed his thinking, writing, and personal habits of consumption and charity.[121] Moreover, writing expressly to a Brethren in Christ audience a year after the publication of *Rich Christians*, he claimed that the book's emphasis on living counter-culturally grew out of the church's doctrine on nonconformity. The Brethren in Christ's historic "refusal to live according to the accepted norms and values of the world," he wrote, had decisively shaped his conviction that Christians ought to reject materialism and affluence in favor of generosity and simplicity.[122] He enjoined his fellow church members and leaders to re-engage these theological insights, since he believed that the church's transition from an ethnic subculture to a mainstream denomination had induced many to embrace uncritically the larger society's obsession with wealth and middle-class, suburban comfort.[123] Like other Brethren in Christ of his generation, Sider defined separation from the world as more than a set of rigid dress standards or a pious separatism from individual vices; rather, nonconformity required a biblical repudiation of the rampant materialism, nationalism, and individualism of North American society.[124]

Shaped decisively by their community's turn toward an evangelical identity in the years after World War II, Sider and other Brethren in Christ

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118. On the political dimensions of *Rich Christians*, see Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 158; Swartz, "Re-Baptizing Evangelicalism," 274-275; and Jeffrey McClain Jones, "Ronald Sider and Radical Evangelical Political Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1990), 140-198.

119. On Sider's language of sin, see Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 156-158, and Stafford, 18-22.

120. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 160.

121. Joel Fetzer and Gretchen S. Carnes, "Dr. Ron Sider: Mennonite Environmentalist on the Evangelical Left," in *Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Politics: Ten Profiles*, ed. Jo Renée Formicola and Hubert Morken (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 159-160; and Ronald J. Sider, "On the Writing of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 1, no. 1 (June 1978), 36-37.

122. Ibid., 38.

123. Ibid., 38-40.

124. Ibid.

like him drew upon and redefined the doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance. Amid the social provocations of the late 1960s and 1970s, these progressive Brethren in Christ entered the public sphere in order to advance theological and political arguments about pacifism and economic justice. In so doing, the Brethren in Christ, despite their small size, significantly shaped an emergent progressive evangelical coalition.

A Growing Evangelical Brotherhood

Yet as Sider led the Evangelical Left and as some Brethren in Christ articulated a progressive vision of Christian social action, most church members in the late 1960s and 1970s continued to engage with their fellow evangelicals in more conventional ways. The church maintained its membership in the National Association of Evangelicals, with key leaders serving on the organization's boards and committees.[125] Leaders participated in a variety of evangelical initiatives, including the 1969 U.S. Congress on Evangelism, the 1971 Canadian Congress on Evangelism, Key '73, and the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland, among others.[126] Teens and young adults participated in triennial Urbana mission conferences as well as Explo '72, a massive evangelistic conference sponsored by the evangelical para-church group Campus Crusade for Christ.[127] In these years the Brethren in Christ also joined the growing Church Growth movement, adopting the insights of the academic discipline of anthropology as well as the business strategies of demographic research and advertising to start new

125. See the reports of the denominational representative to the N.A.E. in *General Conference Minutes*, 1965-1980.

126. On the U.S. Congress, see John E. Zercher, "From the Editor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Oct. 6, 1969, 2, 15; "Gleanings from the Congress," Oct. 6, 1969, 4-5, 15; Ginder, "What Did the Congress Say to the Brethren in Christ?" 4-5. On the Canadian Congress, see Ross Nigh, "Evangelism and the Rejected," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 25, 1971, 4, and Harold Nigh, "Evangelism and Education," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 25, 1971, 12. On Key '73, see H. A. Ginder, "Key '73—Our Involvement," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 10, 1971, 16; Henry A. Ginder, "The Spirit of Evangelism," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 25, 1972, 2; Henry A. Ginder, "Key '73 in Focus," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 25, 1973, 6. On Laussane, see John E. Zercher, "Lausanne to Nappanee," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 10, 1974, 3; Fred Holland, "Lausanne '74," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 10, 1974, 4-5; "Brethren in Christ at Lausanne," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 25, 1974, 4; "No Time to Build Tabernacles," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 25, 1974, 4-5.

127. On Urbana conferences, see Marlin Zook, "Urbana '67—Reflections," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 26, 1968, 5; Daryl R. Climenhaga, "No Answer Outside of Christ," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 10, 1971, 6; Martin H. Schrag, "Missions are Not Passé," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 10, 1971, 6, 10; Carol McBeth, "Reflections—Urbana 73," *Evangelical Visitor*, 13; Wendy Long and Sue Snyder, "More Reflections on Urbana 73," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 25, 1973, 13; "The Brethren in Christ at Urbana '79," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 10, 1980, 8-9. On Explo '72, see George Kimber, "Explo 72—Oh Wow!" *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 10, 1972, 11-13. For an analysis of Explo '72 in the history of American evangelicalism, see John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 139-146.

congregations. Bishops held Church Growth seminars for their pastors, and some leaders even studied under movement gurus Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner at Fuller Theological Seminary.[128] In addition to these denominational efforts, local congregations also stressed outreach and adopted evangelical strategies and programs for converting people to Christian faith. Pastors and other leaders attended the lay evangelism seminars conducted by Campus Crusade for Christ at Arrowhead Springs, California, as well as the Evangelism Explosion workshops pioneered by Presbyterian fundamentalist D. James Kennedy at his church in Coral Ridge, Florida.[129]

As a result, the church grew from over 9,500 members in 1965 to almost 16,000 members by 1980.[130] Brethren in Christ leaders repeatedly lauded the group's expansion, and particularly its increasing ethnic and racial diversity, as evidence of the fact that the church had rejected parochialism and tribalism. For instance, although almost all church members in this period identified as white, articles in the *Evangelical Visitor* frequently highlighted the black, Latino/a, and Navajo Brethren in Christ worshipping in congregations in New York City, at the Texas/Mexico border, and within the Navajo reservation in northern New Mexico.[131]

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128. Initial Brethren in Christ forays into the establishment of new churches occurred under a program called "Church Extension," but its paradigms reflected much of the thinking of the larger Church Growth movement pioneered by Donald McGavran and others. On Brethren in Christ efforts at church extension and planting, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience,* 505-506; and reports by the Director of Evangelism and Church Planting, *General Conference Minutes*, 1974-1978. On Brethren in Christ at Fuller Seminary, see R. Donald Shafer, *Laugh, Love, and Lift* (Bloomington, Ind.: iUniverse, 2012), 108-114. Shafer, who served as bishop in the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the Brethren in Christ Church from 1975-1984 and in that role used church growth methodology to help plant several congregations, points out that he was in the "first class of the Fuller Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry track where the whole church growth movement started with Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner" (113). For a brief but insightful history of Church Growth thinking, see Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 128-135. Worthen also highlights Anabaptist critiques of Church Growth paradigms, but such criticism rarely appeared in Brethren in Christ literature.

129. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience,* 506-509; Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, *Committed to Community: A Centennial History of the Carlisle Brethren in Christ Church* (Carlisle, Pa.: Carlisle Brethren in Christ Church, 2012), 56-58; Harvey R. Sider, *Casting a Long Shadow*, 131; Henry A. Ginder, "BIC Men and Evangelism," *Evangelical Visitor*, Feb. 10, 1971, 5; Walter Winger, "Like a Mighty Army," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 10, 1971, 5-6.

130. *General Conference Minutes*, 1965, 176; *General Conference Minutes*, 1980, 298-312.

131. See, for instance, J. Wilmer Heisey, "World Hunger Fund: Chaco Canyon Style," July 25, 1979, 9; Lois M. Martin, "Visit to Pharr and Mexico Ministries," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 10, 1980, 9; Warren Hoffman, "Standing Together," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 25, 1980, 12-13; Janet Hykes Dick, "One Small Candle," *Evangelical Visitor*, Nov. 10 1980, 6-7; "We Therefore Recommend," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 10, 1982, 9-10; Alice Dourte, "Realizing the Vision," *Evangelical Visitor*, Aug. 25, 1982, 8; "Brethren in Christ Churches Join in Sharing Groceries with Urban Poor," *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 1982, 15; Ethel Bundy, "An Indigenous Navajo Church," *Evangelical Visitor*, Dec. 1985, 18; Ethel Bundy, "Roy and Nancy Larvingo," *Evangelical Visitor*, Jan. 1986, 19.

More explicitly, the Canadian bishop Harvey Sider expressed pride that "non-ethnic Brethren in Christ names are multiplying" in congregations established through church-growth practices.[132] And others lauded the church for welcoming these new members into the "brotherhood," using language that ironically tied the group back to its ethnic roots.[133] Many attributed this growth to the church's turn toward an evangelical identity and toward a desire to engage with rather than isolate itself from North American society.[134]

Yet amid these triumphalist celebrations of growth, the church hierarchy did not concurrently neglect or downplay the emphasis on peacemaking and social concerns increasingly woven into Brethren in Christ identity. A Brethren in Christ report on the 1969 U.S. Congress on Evangelism, for instance, emphasized the need for balancing evangelism with social action.[135] At the 1971 Canadian Congress on Evangelism, Brethren in Christ delegates participated in a roundtable discussion on evangelism among "the rejected," including "political enemies."[136] Brethren in Christ collaborated with Mennonites to sponsor Probe '72, a conference focused on developing methods for winning Christian converts that featured sessions such as "Peace as Evangelism."[137] In church planting efforts, leaders spoke frequently of the need to emphasize doctrinal particularities. In 1962, the Ohio minister C. W. Boyer contended that pastors ought to preach nonresistance and simplicity even as they endeavored to grow their congregations. Nearly two decades later, the Canadian bishop Harvey Sider echoed that conviction, saying that "church growth and Brethren in Christ distinctives do not stand in contradiction to one another."[138]

Thus, in the early 1980s, despite significant growth and some diversification, many Brethren in Christ still saw themselves and their community as religiously and culturally distinctive. Though they had embraced an evangelical identity that thrust them into mainstream North American society, they continued to embrace beliefs and practices tied deeply to their sense of "brotherhood."

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132. Sider, "Church Growth and/or Doctrine—Which?", 3.

133. Mrs. Aurea Rickel, [letter to the editor], *Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 10, 1980, 3.

134. For instance, see Byers, "The Brethren in Christ Church in My Lifetime," 24-26.

135. Ginder, "What Did the Congress Say to the Brethren in Christ?" 4.

136. Nigh, "Evangelism and the Rejected," 4.

137. On Probe '72, see Bush, "Anabaptism Born Again," 37-38.

138. C. W. Boyer, "Distinctive Emphases and Church Extension," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 14, 1962, 5-6; Harvey R. Sider, "Church Growth and/or Doctrine—Which?", 3.

CONCLUSION

Yet not all Brethren in Christ viewed their community's postwar transformation in the same triumphalist terms. In 1978, the church historian Carlton Wittlinger argued that the Brethren in Christ had become so acculturated that their doctrine of nonconformity now had little meaning except as words on a page. Wittlinger chastised his fellow church members: If earlier generations practiced legalism because they saw "the world" everywhere, "perhaps we should ask ourselves whether we can see the world anywhere."[139] A decade later, the theologian and former bishop Owen Alderfer posited that the distinctive features of Anabaptist faith, including nonresistance and nonconformity, represented a "burden" for the late-twentieth-century Brethren in Christ, a drag holding them back from full participation in American religious life.[140] Most critically of all, in the mid-1990s, the theologian Luke Keefer Jr. baldly asserted that the Brethren in Christ's identification with evangelicalism had corrupted their theology of the church and compromised their peace witness.[141] For Wittlinger, Alderfer, Keefer, and others, the Brethren in Christ assimilation into North American society, facilitated by their evangelical identity, had corrupted, not preserved, the community's distinctiveness.

These criticisms emerged at a particular moment in North American religious and political life, as a new Christian Right rose to public prominence and as politicians proclaimed themselves "born again." They also emerged at a time of evident change among Brethren in Christ, as demographers tracked a sharp decline in members' commitments to both nonconformity and nonresistance.[142] Perhaps these developments shaped scholars' initial assessments of the mid-twentieth-century developments in Brethren in Christ life and thought, and the role of evangelicalism in those transformations.

In retrospect, however, the declension narratives forwarded by Wittlinger, Alderfer, and Keefer obscure a more dynamic story. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, members of the Brethren in

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139. Carlton O. Wittlinger, "The Faith of Our Founders," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 10, 1978, 11.

140. Owen Alderfer, "Anabaptism as 'Burden' for the Brethren in Christ," in *Within the Perfection of Christ: Essays on Peace and the Nature of the Church*, eds. Terry L. Brensinger and E. Morris Sider (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1991), 250-264.

141. Luke L. Keefer Jr., "The Three Streams in Our Heritage: Separate or Parts of a Whole?" *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 19, no. 1 (April 1996), 26-63.

142. J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991), 174; and John R. Yeatts and Ronald J. Burwell, "The Brethren in Christ at A.D. 2000," in *Reflections on a Heritage: Defining the Brethren in Christ*, ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, Pa.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1999), 229-232.

Christ Church emerged from the ethnic enclave and entered into an increasingly technologized, professionalized, and globalized world. Faced with mounting internal conflict as a result of this transition, many Brethren in Christ in the 1950s and early 1960s joined with other Protestants to collectively craft an identity they called evangelicalism. This new identity shaped the community in at least two critical ways. First, it provided a religious justification for the Brethren in Christ's selective integration into North American society. Evangelicalism gave leaders and laypeople the language and rhetoric to explain and justify their decisions to cast off ethnic particularities, enter professional careers, pursue higher education, and participate in electoral politics. These decisions shortened the sometimes real and sometimes imagined distance between the sectarian Brethren in Christ and their neighbors, even as it also made church members more aware of their national and global citizenships. In time, many Brethren in Christ pointed to this new evangelical identity as a catalyst for the numerical growth of their small religious community.

Second, and somewhat paradoxically, this newfound evangelical identity enabled the Brethren in Christ to retain a sense of religious and cultural distinctiveness. In the 1950s and early 1960s, a select group of church leaders and scholars used evangelical venues to share a theological critique of war, while others drew on evangelical resources for retaining specific church traditions. At times, these decisions put the Brethren in Christ at odds with their fellow evangelicals; at other times, they created vital links between other Protestant groups and the small Brethren in Christ community. Yet by the late 1960s and 1970s, a growing divide between conservatives and progressives within the evangelical subculture allowed the Brethren in Christ to shape an emergent Evangelical Left. Leaders such as Ron Sider drew on the community's longstanding doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance to articulate religious arguments about pacifism and economic justice that captured the imaginations of evangelical progressives. In this way, the Brethren in Christ's use of an evangelical identity gave them outsized influence in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

This dynamic story offers a different way of understanding the evolution of the Brethren in Christ Church. Yet perhaps more importantly, it reveals the limitations of the narratives commonly used by historians to understand interactions between Anabaptists and evangelicals. Like Wittlinger, Alderfer, and Keefer, some scholars have proffered declension narratives focused on the corrupting influence of evangelicalism. Still others have put forth narratives designed to suggest rapprochement between the two traditions. For the most part, both of these models regrettably frame Anabaptism and evangelicalism as stable categories with static boundaries and defining qualities. In fact, as this essay has

endeavored to show, these categories are not universal. Rather, historical actors invent tradition in context to meet particular needs. In the wake of World War II, the Brethren in Christ helped to craft what it meant to be evangelical. Later, while still claiming an evangelical identity, they refashioned the meanings of and practices associated with Anabaptism to make sense of the cultural convulsions of the Vietnam War, the counterculture movement, and the growth of Western materialism. This case study suggests that scholars should understand both Anabaptism and evangelicalism as constructed and contested sets of theological ideas and practices that are created, claimed, and used in different ways at different times and places. Groups such as the Brethren in Christ strategically adopted and deployed both of these identities, often simultaneously, in the postwar years. In so doing, they played a key role in inventing and re-inventing both evangelicalism and Anabaptism in the late twentieth century.

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