

## Early Brethren Hermeneutical Perspective

by Andrew S. Hamilton\*

*"So then, if some more brethren wish to begin this high act of baptism with us out of brotherly unity according to the teachings of Christ and the apostles, we announce in humbleness that we are interceding together in prayer and fasting with God."<sup>1</sup> -Alexander Mack*

### Introduction

The purpose for this paper is to define the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren, which I will argue has been affected essentially by both Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. Therefore, this chapter will define and describe Radical Pietism and Anabaptism and their contribution to the Brethren identity. Special attention will be given to Vernard Eller's argument that the Brethren identity is a dialectic tension between Pietism and Anabaptism. I will argue that it is not necessary to describe the Brethren identity as a dialectic tension, nor is it appropriate to describe them as Anabaptist over against Pietist and vice versa. Finally, in this paper I will describe the Early Brethren Bible reading method that extends out of their identity.

### Hermeneutical Perspective Explained

Before this chapter can adequately answer the question, "What is the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective?", we must first specify what is meant by "hermeneutical perspective." The phrase is made up of two distinct and significant terms which connote context and identity. The first term, "hermeneutical," denotes both the act of interpretation and that which affect one's interpretation. The term "hermeneutic(al)" has been described as referring to the principles people use to understand or interpret communicative messages regardless of form.<sup>2</sup>

The second term in the above phrase is "perspective." While "hermeneutical" refers primarily to the means of understanding, "perspective" refers to all contextual experience which affects the process of understanding. It can be

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understood as synonymous with "point-of-view," as the Oxford Concise English Dictionary defines it as "a position from which a thing is viewed," or "a particular way of considering a matter."<sup>3</sup> A "perspective" or "point-of-view" consists of the values, presuppositions, and biases held by the relevant individual or community.

When used in tandem, as is the case for this chapter, "hermeneutical perspective" denotes not only the means by which an individual or community comes to understand something, but also openly acknowledges the multifaceted context of that individual or community. In addition to the external factors which affect the community's perception, more significantly internal factors exist within the community that form the core of identity and create a metaphorical lens through which the community perceives. In the context of the Early Brethren, these internal factors are the core convictions that extend from their unique narrative.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this essay will set out to establish both the means by which the Early Brethren interpreted scripture, and the perspective or point-of-view that contributes to the creation of meaning<sup>5</sup> in the interpretive process. While establishing methodology is somewhat less difficult, establishing the point-of-view or perspective of any given community can be more challenging. As formerly defined, the perspective consists of values, presuppositions and biases held by an individual or community.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the goal of this exercise is to identify a number of conviction statements (central narrative convictions) which express the perspective of the Early Brethren community.

### **Pietist**

Concerning the perspective or point-of-view that affects the means of interpretation, there are two primary controlling factors that form the foundation of the Early Brethren identity: Pietism and Anabaptism.<sup>7</sup> It is against these two backdrops that Early Brethren must be understood. The Early Brethren movement developed immediately out of Radical Pietism. While both Pietism and Radical Pietism share some of the same characteristics, through the years historians have found it necessary to distinguish between the two. Pietism is the initial movement from which Radical Pietism developed. Therefore a brief discussion and description of Pietism and Radical Pietism is necessary. This section will propose that there are several primary characteristics that make up the perspective of the Radical Pietists which significantly affected the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective.

### *Pietism*

Pietism is a complex movement which is extremely difficult if not

impossible to narrowly define. Historians have described it as having many branches often reflecting the teachings of particular leaders, such as Arndt, Spener, Francke, etc. Because Church Pietism merely serves as a backdrop for Radical Pietism, it is, thus, not central to the argument of this thesis. Therefore, I will offer only a summary of the aspects of Pietism that essentially affected the development of Radical Pietism and ultimately the Early Brethren. This by no means attempts to comprehensively describe Pietism.

Pietism<sup>8</sup> has been described as a "religious revival, reacting to the emotional sterility of the government sponsored and supported churches."<sup>9</sup> This is a limited description that expresses more the motivation and cause of Pietism than it provides a description of the movement. In essence Pietism is a renewal movement that began within Protestantism beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It sought individual religious renewal which would extend to the renewal of church and society while emphasizing the importance of religious fellowship. Reflecting much of Francke's thought, Pietists believed that Christians must grow in faith, wisdom, good works, and must separate themselves from the "world."<sup>10</sup> In addition they worked toward establishing a biblical perspective for both a religious and ethical life. This means that they not only studied the scripture but endlessly sought to practice its principles in daily living. Pietists believed that the authentic Christian life was characterized by active ethical living. They sought complete dedication and investment of one's energies toward Christian living. This was characterized by self-examination, (daily) repentance, prayer, hearing or reading scripture, and taking part in the sacraments.<sup>11</sup> Even as the Reformers held to this same idea, the Pietists sought to live uncompromisingly and consistently according to the principles of scripture (particularly the New Testament). They strove for a distinctive lifestyle which in itself was a criticism of the religious and ethical standards held by the established churches.

Traditionally Pietism has been described through the writings of its founders, such as Spener, Arndt, Francke, etc. From these we are able to discern particular emphases and convictions which characterize Pietism. Chauncey David Ensign cites six suggestions for church renewal that are rooted in Spener's works.<sup>12</sup> These suggestions emphasize three specific ideas that epitomize Pietist thinking: the ability and necessity of the laity to study scripture, the importance of ethical living by all believers, the increased value of all believers as is expressed in "priesthood of all believers" and the focus upon laity participation regarding religious activity particularly the use of common language in all theological discussions.

In addition to these characteristics Andrew Landale Drummond offers further observations. He characterizes the Pietists by their 1) eager desire to preach

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a simple religion of the heart, 2) expression of immediate feelings rather than reflective study, 3) an emphasis on the second birth, 4) the fellowship created by all those who share this experience, 5) a distinction between the quality of life of the converted and those of the world, 6) devotional reading of the Bible, 7) spiritual intelligence,<sup>13</sup> 8) priesthood of all believers, 9) discipleship is not about accepting dogma but a call to holiness, philanthropy, and evangelism.<sup>14</sup> These observations recognize two additional emphases present in Pietism: the experiential nature of faith, especially in the expression of emotional response to scripture and devotion, and the second birth. Therefore from these descriptions of Pietism we come to a general understanding of its nature.

While Pietism certainly had positive effects upon Christian faith it also has been criticized as going to extremes. Dale Brown, says that Pietism "has contributed to hypocritical legalism, experiential fanaticism, narrow-minded dogmatism, and loveless separatism."<sup>15</sup> Radical Pietists used some of these same criticisms against the Anabaptists. However, unlike Anabaptism, Pietism sought not to form a new church but to renew the existing one. Pietists were inclined to complete the work started by the reformers.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Church Pietism would need no specific theology apart from that of the church to which they belonged, because according to some substantial leaders in the movement (Spener being one), the goal was to remain in the church and work to bring renewal from the inside.

The focus of experience and emotions within the context of biblical devotion is of particular importance regarding the Early Brethren. In the fellowship of the Early Brethren we find this sense of zeal or religious fervour accompanied by a discerned conviction following scriptural study. Having intensely studied scripture as a group, and following much prayer and devotion, the group of sisters and brothers felt convicted to obey the scripture.<sup>17</sup> They became convinced to the extent of risking persecution for the need to be baptized.

Dale Stoffer's study recognizes four basic components that most scholars agree upon regarding Pietism: "(1) the new birth, (2) the new life, (3) emphasis on the Bible, (4) an optimistic call for reform."<sup>18</sup> The Pietist emphasis on "new birth" refers to both Francke's and Spener's conviction that all Christians are called to a radical change of life. For both Francke and Spener this "radical change" is not a once and for all transformation.<sup>19</sup> Instead it is a lifelong process of change. Stoffer adds, "The new birth effects a new state of being in the believer in which he is united with Christ in a psychological and volitional union."<sup>20</sup> This underscores the human role in this life changing event as being a response of faith. Pietists emphasized the new birth as the event in which God not only pardons the sin of the believer but also begins the process of transforming the life of the sinner. There is a

definite dualistic understanding in Pietism which contrasts the power of God with the power of sin.<sup>21</sup>

A direct outgrowth of a "new birth" is the "new life." This component of Pietism is based upon their idea that sanctification is a transformation of character, which is a joint working of both God and the individual. More pointedly to Stoffer's explanation, God initiates the process and provides the strength and power necessary to accomplish it.<sup>22</sup>

The source, however, for their convictions is found in the centrality of scripture. Pietists held scripture as their source of life and growth. Yet this is not the most significant aspect of this pietistic component. Pietists continued the Reformation in biblical interpretation. They sought to complete what the reformers started by seeking to "free the scripture from formalistic methods of interpretation."<sup>23</sup> For orthodoxy, the controlling factor with biblical interpretation was the creeds. Pietism sought to break the cords of the creeds freeing biblical interpretation. Both Spener and Francke assert that Scripture must be its own interpreter. "The meaning of a passage must be considered in its broader context, while difficult passages should be interpreted by those which are clear."<sup>24</sup> Stoffer points out that this was important so that the common person could become familiar with the "simple message" of scripture and order their lives accordingly.<sup>25</sup> Finally, Pietism was rooted in the German Reformation and thus possessed an optimistic sense that change within the church could occur. It was their belief that the Reformation was not finished and that more had to be accomplished.

### *Radical Pietism*

While many Pietists met in their conventicles opting to remain in the established church, some became increasingly disconcerted with the deadness in the established church and decided to separate (thus, the term "separatists") from the church. Thus it became necessary for historians to distinguish between the "moderate" Pietists, who opted to remain in the established church, and the more "radical" Pietists who left. Stoffer identifies the radical movement as "a branch of the Pietist movement which expressed its piety through channels which were mystical, spiritualistic, Boehmist, and separatistic."<sup>26</sup>

In Ensign's notable work regarding Radical Pietism, he distinguishes fourteen distinctive doctrinal beliefs that were generally held by the broad categorization of Radical Pietism. The first doctrinal belief listed is (1) *Trinitarianism*. This, according to Ensign, was only loosely held by Radical Pietists.<sup>27</sup> Boehme, who is one of the primary sources of Radical Pietist doctrinal beliefs, sought to avoid speaking of God as three persons. "For him, this one,

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divine *Wesen* has revealed Himself in three forms in the process of creation."<sup>28</sup> Radical Pietists saw Trinitarian formulations as the decline of the early church.<sup>29</sup> Because of their aversion to Trinitarian terminology, Radical Pietists appear to have been modalistic in their understanding of God. The second doctrinal belief which Ensign distinguishes is (2) *Christology*. According to Ensign, some Boehmists developed a Christology which suggested that Christ was "conceived by the heavenly *Sophia*, and that he was born spiritually androgynous."<sup>30</sup> Radical Pietists also developed distinctive (3) *doctrinal beliefs concerning marriage*. While early on they elevated celibacy and considered marriage as carnal, the Radical Pietist eventually came to accept Hochmann's five point doctrine concerning marriage. This doctrine consisted of the following five levels:

- 1) The completely beastly. This occurs when men take wives like dumb beasts, purely from the sexual motive . . .
- 2) The honorable and moral, but heathenish. All legal requirements are observed, but the marriage is heathenish because the partners do not stand in covenant with God, and the marriage is entered into out of worldly considerations . . .
- 3) The Christian. Such a marriage takes place when two who are made holy through the blood of Jesus unite in married love, with the love of Christ, who loved the *Gemeine* and gave Himself for her . . .
- 4) The fourth, and more advanced grade is the *Jungfräuliche*, when two who are consecrated to God and the Lamb unite for no other purpose than to help each other to a fuller holiness by uniting their prayers, and also helping in physical need . . .
- 5) That of a soul married to the Lamb. Such a one, who has had Christ for "*Mann*," or "*Braut*," will attain the highest degree of glory in the Kingdom of Christ, and will sit on the right hand of the Messiah.<sup>31</sup>

This doctrinal belief sheds light on why some of the Early Brethren left the Germantown *Gemeinde* to join the Ephrata community which strongly held this doctrine. The Radical Pietist influence upon the Early Brethren was a real presence in the minds of the brothers and sisters. Even Alexander Mack Jr. spent some time in the Ephrata community.

Radical Pietism also reflected a (4) *nature mysticism*.<sup>32</sup> According to Ensign, Boehme was considered a nature mystic because of his openness to alchemy, astronomy, and magic.<sup>33</sup> More specifically he is considered this because: . . . for him the universe is regarded as a total organism, of which man is the *microcosm* B the epitome B or concentration of the universe; the universe, or

*macrocosm*, is an extension and development of that which exists in man in a state of concentrated unity.<sup>34</sup>

Due to their openness and their understanding that God wills certain knowledge within his people, Radical Pietists were open to revelation concerning natural secrets. This is illustrated in that some, as Boehme also did, began dispensing medicine.<sup>35</sup>

Another doctrinal belief, which Radical Pietists affirmed, was (5) *Quietism*. Quietism is the mystical belief that one should wait upon God. Ensign says, "Quietism, from the turn of the eighteenth century onward, was to become, next to Boehmism, the greatest single influence in radical Pietism."<sup>36</sup> While Quietism quieted the ecstatic outward experiences of Radical Pietism, it also turned their focus inward adding a new mystical characteristic. Unfortunately its extreme resulted in an aversion to good works. In addition to Quietism, the Radical Pietists possessed a (6) *mystical theology*. By mystical theology, Ensign explains, "The pedagogical and social emphases in Pietism tended to force all forms of mysticism into one mold, denominated 'mystical theology.'"<sup>37</sup> This denominated "mystical theology" was divided into three stages of mystical experiences: purification, enlightenment, and union.<sup>38</sup> The highest elevation, of course, was union with God.<sup>39</sup>

The next doctrinal belief for Radical Pietism concerned the (7) *Bible and inspiration*. According to Ensign, Radical Pietists often interpreted scripture allegorically. Moreover, he says that they would regularly "attach mystic significance to commonplace statements."<sup>40</sup> As a consequence of this mystical emphasis, they believed that revelation was a current occurrence. This led to the belief that they too could be "inspired."<sup>41</sup> These new revelations from the Spirit were always secondary and were to supplement and agree with scripture. This would have been an empowering experience for an oppressed community. Now they could possess a greater influence in their communities. Ensign asserts that they would claim that secrets were "revealed to them in visions, dreams, and meditations."<sup>42</sup> Thus Radical Pietists had an openness to new revelation.

Additionally Radical Pietists held to the doctrinal belief of (8) *Salvation of the Heathen*. This was the understanding that the heathen have the inner word in their hearts and thus may be saved if they obey it. This means that they believed salvation could be obtained apart from the historic Christian revelation.<sup>43</sup> It asserts that God reveals himself to all people through the inner light. Therefore anyone may be saved if they follow that inner light. Regarding (9) *salvation and sanctification*, Ensign says "Boehme shared the Lutheran teaching that salvation was by grace through faith."<sup>44</sup> But unlike Luther, Boehme and the Radical Pietists

rejected any form of imputation theory. For the Radical Pietists, one must repent from sin before God can forgive it.<sup>45</sup> Salvation was not a punctiliar event. Rather, for the Radical Pietists it was a process in which Christ takes shape within the individual. However, much like the moderate Pietists an essential emphasis was placed upon rebirth. Thus the initial stage in the (10) *salvation process* is rebirth. Then following the death of the old self, the light of Christ begins to grow within the individual allowing the person to experience the life of Christ in the world.<sup>46</sup> Finally, after death, the light that was growing in the body becomes the "basis for resurrection." However, Radical Pietists would have denied a physical resurrection.<sup>47</sup>

The next doctrinal belief concerns (11) *voluntarism and predestination*. While from the human perspective, salvation was through faith, the Radical Pietists denied the Reformed doctrine of predestination that emphasized a deterministic view of God.<sup>48</sup> For Boehme, God is a loving God who wills salvation to all people.<sup>49</sup> According to Ensign, "Boehme had a hatred for the teaching of predestination, which kept even those radical Pietists of Reformed background from belief in it, and led them to oppose deterministic philosophies."<sup>50</sup> Therefore Radical Pietists would tend toward a belief that the future is open.

(12) *Sanctification* was another of the doctrinal convictions of the Radical Pietists. All Pietists emphasized sanctification. They believed that followers of Christ must "abstain from all 'worldly' ways, and from sinful amusements."<sup>51</sup> Their doctrinal belief of sanctification focused on the obedient life. One should continuously obey the commands of God. While they would suggest that this be done until perfection is achieved, it must be noted that "perfection" does not imply faultlessness. Instead, it simply implies one's continual willingness to obey the commands of God "to the best of one's knowledge and ability."<sup>52</sup>

(13) *Universalism* was also a conviction of the Radical Pietists. Their understanding of universalism was based upon the idea that all of God's actions always worked toward redemption.<sup>53</sup> This conviction extended to the belief that even God's punishments were for the purpose of redeeming souls.<sup>54</sup> There was also, however, the understanding that all people (as well as Satan and his angels) would pass through a purifying fire that would ultimately reconcile them to God.<sup>55</sup> While this was a generally held conviction, most were hesitant to proclaim this for fear that those who were not yet regenerate would resist living a holy life.

The final doctrine Ensign lists is (14) *apocalypticism*. This was a popular movement throughout the seventeenth century due to the Thirty Years' War. The war's impact left people looking for coming of their Savior. The Radical Pietists carefully recorded catastrophes and other events that were understood as judgments



from God.<sup>56</sup> However, for Boehme, there was no earthly millennium reign. Unlike the chiliastic understandings, Jesus' second coming was to be in spirit. Generally, the Radical Pietists expected the conversion of the "Jews and heathen."<sup>57</sup> Ensign states that "time-setting" was dissuaded, even though some still attempted to do so.<sup>58</sup>

While Ensign offers a thorough detailed description of the Radical Pietists, Willoughby designates them as "Pietists who had been members of a local church, but who withdrew from active participation."<sup>59</sup> In the process of distinguishing the distinctive convictions of the Radical Pietists as to Willoughby's observations, it is necessary to note that the Radical Pietist movement was "essentially a protest against the state church."<sup>60</sup> Therefore as Willoughby offers four primary convictions of the Radical Pietists, with which the Early Brethren agreed, these convictions are stated in contradiction to the state church. Moreover, his description of the Radical Pietists focuses upon Ernst Hochmann and Samuel König. The purpose of this focus is due to the direct relationship that the Early Brethren shared with Hochmann.

Between 1699 and 1700, Hochmann helped form a loosely organized fellowship called the Philadelphian fellowship or the "Society of Brothers."<sup>61</sup> Renkewitz provides six distinguishing characteristics of this new group.<sup>62</sup> Of the six distinctive characteristics as provided by Renkewitz, Willoughby says that only four were agreed upon by the Early Brethren.<sup>63</sup> Willoughby's concludes that inasmuch as the Early Brethren were influenced by the Radical Pietists, they were equally troubled by the "individualism and the lack of continuing community," which were core elements of Radical Pietism.<sup>64</sup> Donald Durnbaugh extends this conclusion in his work, *Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Eighteenth Century Europe*, when he infers that the Brethren entirely left behind Radical Pietism and adopted the tenets of Anabaptism.<sup>65</sup> However, Ensign offers a contrary argument that suggests that the Early Brethren cannot be explained apart from Radical Pietism. In his argument he emphasizes the many similarities that the Early Brethren shared with the Radical Pietists. He argues that they opposed the imputation theory of atonement; they opposed the Calvinist doctrine of predestination; they objected to eating blood; etc.<sup>66</sup> Yet Ensign also acknowledges that the Anabaptists (Mennonites) also shared these beliefs. The point of the matter is that while the Early Brethren came out of Radical Pietism, they did not necessarily leave it entirely behind. Ensign rightly acknowledges the overlapping of beliefs between the Radical Pietists and the Anabaptists. Nevertheless, simply because the Early Brethren recognized the importance of community does not mean that they forfeited their Radical Pietist beliefs. The

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answer as to the identity (and thus the hermeneutical perspective) of the Early Brethren does not lie in either of the two points-Radical Pietism or Anabaptism. To answer this apparent dilemma, the identity of the Brethren has been characterized in recent times as a dialectic tension between (Radical) Pietism and Anabaptism.<sup>67</sup> While the two traditions share many similar beliefs, the seeming dichotomies of community/individualism, inward/outward manifestations of spirituality appear to epitomize the tension that exists within the Early Brethren.

Stoffer describes the Radical Pietists as "one of the most colorful movements in the history of Christianity."<sup>68</sup> And as such its contributions to the Brethren convictions cannot be understated. The above description of the Pietistic movement (both Radical and Church Pietism) is but a brief outline of the significant contributions to Early Brethren thought. So having thus presented this Pietistic perspective as it has affected the Early Brethren, one finds several distinctive convictions extending out of their beliefs that contribute to the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective. Willoughby cites five convictions which contributed to the origin of Brethren beliefs:

1. The reality of religion is a spiritual experience.
2. The practice of devotional exercises.
3. The use of the Bible as the primary devotional book.
4. The Christian faith is expressed in moral behavior.
5. The Christian faith is expressed in service to those in need.<sup>69</sup>

Yet this list is not complete because it does not express their protest against the institutional church nor does it express their separatistic nature (in that they left the established church). In the institutional church they recognized corruption and oppressive systems. They observed a religion barren of spirituality. Thus they sought spiritual renewal apart from the established church. This separatist attitude spawned the individualistic nature of Radical Pietism. In addition to the recognition of conviction for renewal, Radical Pietists possessed an openness to new insights and revelations apart from scripture.<sup>70</sup>

While the Brethren clearly emerged from the Radical Pietist movement, they also rejected the mystical and spiritualistic excesses of Radical Pietism as they found them not to be consistent with scripture.<sup>71</sup> This is primarily demonstrated in Alexander Mack's treatise concerning questions raised about the Brethren *Gemeinde* by Eberhard Louis Gruber and the Inspirationists. However, elements of Pietism and Radical Pietism still existed in the Early Brethren regardless of their accepting an Anabaptist ecclesiology. Like the Pietists, the Early Brethren were critical of the established churches and of scholasticism; they studied the scriptures individually

and corporately; they possessed the Pietist zeal for devotion; early on they struggled with the issue of marriage, accepting Hochmann's doctrine; experiential faith was emphasized in their fellowship; believers were to follow Christ and obey his commands; they strongly believed in the "priesthood of all saints;" finally, while not openly preaching it, the Early Brethren held to the doctrine of universal restoration.<sup>72</sup>

### **Anabaptist**

While the Early Brethren identity was initially formed in Radical Pietism, they experienced a shift when they acknowledged and embraced the significance of *Gemeinde*. Stoffer states that during the last half of the eighteenth century Mennonites and Radical Pietists developed close ties.<sup>73</sup> It is generally agreed by historians that there were many similarities between the two groups.<sup>74</sup> Yet there are also differences between the two groups and each had an influence upon the Early Brethren.<sup>75</sup> Thus we now turn to the other primary aspect that constitutes the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective-Anabaptism.

As has been established, the fundamental disposition of the Early Brethren was already founded within Radical Pietism. Thus the decision to form a *Gemeinde* was a move away from the Radical Pietist tenets of separatism and a move toward Anabaptist communalism. However, it is necessary first to discuss what is meant by the characterization "Anabaptist." Anabaptism has been defined many different ways. Some in western Christianity fail to recognize the significant and revolutionary nature of Anabaptism. This is best illustrated by the definition of Anabaptism given by mainline Protestantism.<sup>76</sup> Willoughby begins his explanation of early Anabaptism as the "unwanted child of the Reformation."<sup>77</sup> He explains that Anabaptism essentially moved within the lower classes, thus causing fear of civil uprising among the civil authorities.<sup>78</sup> This, in addition to the tragic event at Münster, resulted in the antagonistic opposition of Anabaptism by the state churches and the ruling classes. Anabaptists became a marginalized, oppressed, and persecuted people. When referring to Anabaptism, this thesis refers to those Germanic groups who emphasize radical discipleship and "who effected a church life upon what they thought to be the pattern of the primitive church."<sup>79</sup> This statement presupposes the affirmation of adult baptism upon confession of faith and the rejection of infant baptism. C. Arnold Snyder uses one of the earliest catechisms written for this movement as a means of describing it. Balthasar Hubmaier wrote this particularly interesting catechism that outlines the beliefs of the early Anabaptists. Snyder ensures that the "essentials he enumerated systematically were echoed (less systematically) by Anabaptists elsewhere."<sup>80</sup> In his

text regarding Anabaptist theology, Snyder demonstrates the general doctrinal agreement between the many branches of Anabaptism by breaking down Hubmaier's catechism into an orderly outline of Anabaptist belief and doctrine. A central factor for Anabaptism was their emphasis upon the "inner and outer" transformation and the sanctification of believers.<sup>81</sup> These radical disciples held to a stringent ecclesiology<sup>82</sup> that required outward (visible) signs of one's faith.

The question now arises as to the extent and nature of influence that the Anabaptists (specifically the Mennonites) had upon the Early Brethren. Willoughby states that there was a definite Mennonite presence in the Palatinate.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, while Mack was traveling the region with Hochmann, it is told by Mack Jr. that the two would "now and then" visit Mennonite congregations to preach.<sup>84</sup> In addition to the historical records of the Mennonite presence, there is implicit evidence as to the familiarity of the Early Brethren with the Mennonites. In his tract, "Basic Questions," Alexander Mack states that the Early Brethren agreed fully with all the doctrines of the Mennonites.<sup>85</sup> Yet regardless of the many similarities shared between the Early Brethren's pietistic background and the Anabaptists, Anabaptism still provided significant and unique effects upon the Early Brethren.

According to Harold Bender, there were three core beliefs and teachings of the Anabaptists: "first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance."<sup>86</sup> While this is an oversimplification of the complex doctrines of Anabaptist beliefs, Snyder's thorough examination of Anabaptist theology can be summed up in these three statements.

In his work, Willoughby, offers some Anabaptist beliefs which he believes directly affected the Early Brethren.<sup>87</sup> However, only three of the characteristics affected the Early Brethren: the Apostolic model as the basis of the *Gemeinde*, the existential nature of faith, and the Ban. Stoffer suggests that the existential character of the Mennonites was due to several distinctive emphases: they viewed Christ as the model for the new life; they had a straightforward approach to scripture, which emphasized the Gospels rather than the Pauline epistles; they possessed a conception of soteriology that understood all aspects of conversion directed toward radical discipleship; they believed in the kerygmatic qualities of the ordinances; and they had a limited eschatology of the visible church.<sup>88</sup> Unlike the Protestant groups, the Anabaptists did not dichotomize between faith and obedience. For them faith was obedience. A central focus of their faith was "taking up one's cross and following." Thus the Anabaptists could be characterized as a *Gemeinde* organized according to the Apostolic model and whose faith was existential. The fact that Alexander Mack says, "We are completely agreed with

them as far as their doctrine is concerned, which does not teach anything in contradiction to the gospel,"<sup>89</sup> testifies to the extent of the similarities the two groups shared.

However, once again we must discern to what extent the Anabaptists affected the Early Brethren. While Mack certainly agreed with the Anabaptist doctrines, he also believed them to be an inferior fellowship.<sup>90</sup> While this denotes a difference in practice or more accurately an objection to their lifestyle, Mack qualifies this statement as being based upon their being "deteriorated in doctrine and life."<sup>91</sup> But what does he mean by this? Perhaps a clue as to the source of this statement can be found in Friedrich Arnold's criticism of the Anabaptists as Stoffer points out. Arnold criticizes the Anabaptists for their literal reading and following of scripture, which Arnold sees as the cause of their legalism and "Pharisaism," and their divisiveness.<sup>92</sup> He sees this manifested in pride, willfulness, and legalism.<sup>93</sup> However, while there may be some truth to this suggestion, a more obvious reason for the criticism given by Mack may stem from the ongoing issue of baptism. Mack emphatically disagreed with the Mennonites' mode of baptism. If one's faith practice is to remain consistent with scripture, it must be carried out likewise especially regarding the ordinances.

It has been argued by others that Radical Pietism had a far greater impact upon Anabaptism than *vice versa*.<sup>94</sup> Likewise Anabaptism affected the Early Brethren (who came directly out of Radical Pietism) to a lesser degree than has been argued by other scholars. This conclusion would coincide with Ensign's argument that the majority of Early Brethren beliefs were derived from Radical Pietism rather than Anabaptism.<sup>95</sup> Ensign argues that while Willoughby demonstrates the Anabaptist influence upon the Early Brethren, the Radical Pietists held to most of the same beliefs.<sup>96</sup> This observation would suggest that rather than the Early Brethren being primarily influenced by the Anabaptists when they formalized their fellowship, that it would have been almost natural for them to look toward Anabaptism to supplement their Radical Pietist beliefs as they sought to form a *Gemeinde*. While Willoughby suggests ten Anabaptist beliefs that were incorporated into the Early Brethren consciousness, it should be noted that seven of the suggested beliefs were shared by the Radical Pietists and thus already held by the Early Brethren. The three that distinguish Anabaptism from Radical Pietism were: "1) they were joining the True Church established by Jesus; 2) they deliberately organized their *Gemeinde* after the pattern and spirit of the New Testament, Apostolic church; 3) the ban should be used against all who, having been baptized, yet stumble into sin."<sup>97</sup> While there is no doubt that Anabaptism affected the Early Brethren in life and practice, the Early Brethren were not

indisputably Anabaptist as were the Mennonites. Their Radical Pietist convictions remained. This is especially illustrated with Alexander Mack's criticism of the Mennonites. Thus it can only be stated substantially that Anabaptism affected or contributed to the Early Brethren in terms of organization and discipline. The core convictions, therefore, which Anabaptism affected upon Early Brethrenism concern the formation of the *Gemeinde* and the discipline which it would follow.

### The Dialectic Tension

In 1961 Vernard Eller published an article with the purpose of epitomizing the Church of the Brethren identity. His articulation of the Brethren identity describes a dialectic tension which he saw existing between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism.<sup>98</sup> Unlike a Hegelian dialectic which results in synthesis, Eller argues that it is a relational dialectic that serves as a checks and balance. Eller describes it as follows:

When the Radical Pietist tendency would slide off into subjectivism, private inspiration, mysticism, enthusiasm, or vaporous spiritualism, it is pulled up short by the demand for concrete, outward obedience to an objective Scriptural norm. Conversely, when the Anabaptist tendency would slide off into formalism, legalism, biblical literalism, or works-righteousness, it is checked by the reminder that faith is essentially a work of God within the heart of the individual believer, an intensely personal relationship rather than a legal one. Thus within Brethrenism, Anabaptist influences *discipline* Pietism at the same time that Pietist influences *inspire* Anabaptism.<sup>99</sup>

This idea of dialectic tension counters the earlier arguments by both Ensign and Willoughby who provide convincing arguments as to the Brethren identity being an either/or choice (either Radical Pietist or Anabaptist). As the Early Brethren began to navigate the waters of their new *Gemeinde*, it is plausible that Eller's dialectic tension existed as this new community began attempting to reconcile both sets of beliefs in their daily practice. After all, life practice was the validation of faith.

However, Eller's dialectic tension theory is based upon the premise that there exists distinctive, perhaps even contradictory, differences between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. Eller defines this difference as being an *inner* and *outer* distinction. He argues that the Radical Pietists emphasized an inner spirituality while the Anabaptists emphasized an outer obedience. However, at least two questions arise from Eller's concept. First, is "dialectic tension" an adequate

description of the Brethren's unique and complex identity? And second, do distinctive differences exist between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism to the extent Eller suggests? In other words, does Anabaptism emphasize an outward obedience and not an inward devotion? And does Radical Pietism really emphasize an inward devotion and not an outward obedience?

In Eller's argument, regarding the "dialectic tension," there is a sense of contradiction and a pulling back and forth that exists in the tension as he states that the Brethren identity is not static. Even as Eller attempts to alleviate this sense using concepts of checks and balances one must question if Radical Pietism and Anabaptism are contradictory in some sense. While his illustration and explanation make sense in a general way, some of the specifics, such as the issues of the categorizing of Anabaptism as outward and Radical Pietism as inward, begin to break down under closer scrutiny. First, it is difficult to categorize the Anabaptists generally due in most part to the diversity that exists within the tradition. In a recent work, C. Arnold Snyder presents a history of Anabaptism that portrays the Anabaptists as struggling with an *inner/outer* tension similar to that of the Brethren.<sup>100</sup> In this argument he describes two primary schools of thought: the spiritualist or those emphasizing the inner, and the literalists or those emphasizing the outer.<sup>101</sup> This argument alone illustrates the inability to classify Anabaptism as simply emphasizing outer obedience. Second, contrary to Eller, Radical Pietism certainly calls for outward expressions of faith as is illustrated in their conviction that faith is expressed in moral behavior. Surely Radical Pietists also emphasized good works and charity in their expression of faith.

This then raises the second question posed previously, "do contradicting differences exist between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism?" According to Carl F. Bowman, the currents of Anabaptism and Radical Pietism are "mutually reinforcing."<sup>102</sup> He says, "Viewing Pietism and Anabaptism as *mutually reinforcing currents* . . . illuminates the fact that heightened (or lessened) spirituality may produce heightened (or lessened) obedience and church commitment."<sup>103</sup> Yet even in Bowman's description, the concern is between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. Perhaps the answer to this sense of tension with the inner and outer is not found between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism, but is simply an aspect of Christian faith. Even the Anabaptists experienced a tension between the inner (spiritual) and the outer (obedience). Maybe what the Brethren have been experiencing is the same inward and outward dynamic that Christians have been experiencing for centuries. This is not to lessen the contributions Radical Pietism and Anabaptism have brought to the Brethren identity, but it is to suggest that the tension Eller intuitively discerned does not exist between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism, at least not how

he means it. I would argue instead that the identity of the Brethren is a complex interrelationship of their unique narratives and convictions which derive from both Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. It must be understood that their identity is not duplicitous, but a unified interrelationship of their community's shared memories and the convictions they have discerned from scripture. Furthermore I would argue that the tension which Eller discerns exists in the inward and outward aspects of authentic faith, and that the tension which certainly does exist between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism is found in the form of individualism and community.

As has already been discussed, Radical Pietists believed celibacy (involving marriage to Sophia) as being most desirable and they were extreme separatists having no formal organization but living in loose affiliation with one another. In addition, Radical Pietists believed themselves accountable to no human or human institution. In fact, they resisted forming any formal fellowship as to avoid following in the errors of the established church. These illustrate the individualistic tendencies of Radical Pietism. On other hand the Anabaptists emphasized community holding to a strong ecclesiology that incorporated the ban as a means of accountability. They lived in interdependent communities relying upon each other for the expression of Christ's love. Bender describes them in terms of brotherhood, love, and nonresistance, all terms characteristic of community.<sup>104</sup> While even the Radical Pietists held to some of these as well, the most distinctive difference was the sense of brotherhood and accountability.

While the tension of the inner and outer certainly exists in Brethrenism, it concerns faith and is not a question of Anabaptism or Radical Pietism. The reality is, both Anabaptism and Radical Pietism experience this same inner and outer tension. However, a tension does exist between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. One that strikes at the foundation of the Brethren struggle: the issue of individualism (autonomy) and community (accountability).

### **The Early Brethren Bible Reading Method**

For both Anabaptists and Radical Pietists scripture is the foundation of their faith. Yet unlike the Anabaptists, the Radical Pietists "reasoned that since all 'sects' appeal to Scripture and yet are 'godless' one cannot prove one's faith from Scripture."<sup>105</sup> Alexander Mack directly answers this question, citing 2 Timothy 3:15-17 to emphasize the importance of scripture as authoritative for faith and practice.<sup>106</sup> Thus, from their formation, even as scripture has served as the basis of their faith Brethren have read scripture simplistically. As Durnbaugh has said, "One way to describe their approach is to say that they were biblicists, taking the Bible at face value."<sup>107</sup> To better understand the context of the Early Brethren approach one



must remember their Pietist beginnings. One of the primary convictions of Pietism was that any "awakened Christian" could and should study the Bible.<sup>108</sup> In the spirit of reform, Pietism sought to liberate Christians from the "Orthodox mechanical material view of Scripture."<sup>109</sup> Thus Pietism freed the Bible from the rationalistic and formalistic approaches of the state churches. Stoffer adds that for Pietism a central component of their approach was the "conviction that Scripture does not become effective mechanically but must be brought to life in the soul by the Holy Spirit."<sup>110</sup> This recognition implies that the hermeneut is not the sole interpreter, nor is the scripture the sole source of meaning. The Pietists (as do the Anabaptists) take seriously the role of the Spirit in the interpretation process to such an extent as to trust that the Spirit will lead an untrained layperson to an understanding of scripture.

The stalwart of Pietism, Spener, set out to liberate laypeople and encourage an enthusiastic study of the scriptures. Even while he was encouraging the open study of scripture in conventicles, he was sure to always stipulate the presence of the pastor.<sup>111</sup> Regardless of this effort for some sort of controlling factor, "a discussion format" was used that allowed equal opportunity to share insight and knowledge.<sup>112</sup> It was Spener's intent to free the scriptures from the dogmatism and creedalism that infected the church. Stoffer elaborates this point, "If Scripture was to be the supreme authority, one must not limit its voice by finding in the Bible only what was sanctioned by the creeds."<sup>113</sup> This serves as the basis for an openness in the interpretative process for the Early Brethren as well as the importance of Bible study in community and not merely as individuals, which is the Anabaptist ideal for a hermeneutical community.

In addition to this emphasis upon Bible study, the Anabaptists emphasized the necessity to obey the scripture. In Wenger's article, he describes the Anabaptists as holding strictly to the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura* unlike the Reformers who were not consistent with this.<sup>114</sup> This existential approach to scripture meant that not only were believers to read scripture but also obey it. Discipleship is always a core concern for an Anabaptist approach to scripture. While Anabaptists share some of the same convictions with the Pietists concerning scripture, for them application is the heart of biblical interpretation and accountability to the interpretation was the communal responsibility. In the same way application was central for Early Brethren interpretation.

### *The Brethren and Scripture*

From the very beginnings of the Brethren movement, this group of people were considered by others and themselves as "people of the Word." The

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significance of the Bible is found in the complex authoritative role it plays for the Early Brethren *Gemeinde*. While they continued to hold to the inner leading of the Spirit of Christ, as Hochmann taught them, when they formed the *Gemeinde* a shift occurred in their convictions as well. Obedience became the ultimate expression of faith.<sup>115</sup> Yet even while there is significant evidence of their elevated emphasis on scripture (the outer Word) as the supreme authority, it is equally true that they recognized and emphasized the authority of the inner Word. In his article, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," Martin Schrag observed that Alexander Mack affirmed "both the inner witness and its authority and the outer witness and its authority."<sup>116</sup> He further clarifies this idea as such:

Just because the Scripture is inspired and is the outward form of the message given innerly to the apostles should not lead one to believe that one can come to the outer as the starting point. Scripture cannot be understood until the "inner ears" have been opened. It is possible to read Scripture, talk about Scripture, but "if the spirit of faith is not in him," he will not understand the message.<sup>117</sup>

Therefore, authority did not lie solely upon the outer word, but the convicting Spirit of Christ (the inner Word) was recognized as an equally essential authority.<sup>118</sup> In his article, "Brethren and the Bible," Richard B. Gardner describes the Early Brethren idea of "authority" using four basic statements:

1. Scripture itself is viewed as a product of divine inspiration.
2. The Spirit creates faith in and understanding of the message of Scripture.
3. The Spirit continues to reveal and instruct, writing God's word inwardly in the hearts of the faithful.
4. The inward word of the Spirit agrees fully with the outward word of Scripture.<sup>119</sup>

For the Early Brethren, authority ultimately rests in God as revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>120</sup> This christocentric emphasis of authority extends to their christocentric approach to scripture.

### *Christocentric Interpretative Approach*

While the Early Brethren recognized all scripture to be inspired and authoritative, their approach to scripture was christocentric. In "Basic Questions," Alexander Mack articulates the christocentric approach in terms of "fulfillment in the context of continuity."<sup>121</sup> Answering questions 6, 10, and 11, Mack says that

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and in being such has "annulled the first law because it was too weak and could not make anyone perfect."<sup>122</sup> Mack then says that Christ "secured redemption, revealed the paths to the Holy of Holies, and gave only laws of life."<sup>123</sup> "For this reason," he says, "the teachings of Jesus are rightly to be observed by believers in these days."<sup>124</sup> Thus, for the Early Brethren the life and teachings of Jesus Christ were of supreme importance, being valued above the rest of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. They also held the New Testament above the Old Testament in that it fulfils the Old Testament. This elevation of the New Testament over the Old reflects the similarity Anabaptists shared with the Early Brethren as to valuing the New Testament over the Old. However, the Anabaptist view of scripture was somewhat different.<sup>125</sup>

It is generally agreed that the Early Brethren believed they were called to obedience and discipleship to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. As Schrag rightly notes the christocentric nature of the new *Gemeinde*, "The literal observation of the example and commandments of the Lord Jesus was the new emphasis."<sup>126</sup>

While the Early Brethren certainly held a christocentric approach to scripture, their interpretation of scripture bears more distinctions. Richard B. Gardner writes concerning the Brethren as he describes their approach to biblical interpretation, he says that "at least five distinguishing marks characterize the way Brethren interpret the Bible."<sup>127</sup>

1. Brethren have insisted on reading the Bible with an attitude of openness to new truth.
2. Brethren have approached the Bible with a desire to recover and emulate primitive Christianity.
3. Brethren have interpreted the Old Testament in light of the New Testament in terms of the commands and examples of Jesus Christ.
4. Brethren have emphasized an intrinsic connection between knowing the truth and doing the truth.
5. Brethren have stressed the importance of the community of believers studying the Bible together.<sup>128</sup>

One conviction is not expressed in the above list: no force in religion (which is a significant factor even to the present). The idea of "no force in religion" is based in the experience of the Early Brethren who refused to affirm the doctrines of the institutional church and were consequently persecuted. Both Anabaptists and Radical Pietists experienced persecution because of their supposed "unorthodoxy." Therefore it was a central conviction for this community that one cannot force another to believe as they do, because the work of persuasion was the work of the

Holy Spirit.<sup>129</sup>

*Openness to New Understandings*

From the forming of their *Gemeinde* there was always an attitude of seeking an informed reading of scripture. While Durnbaugh rightly states that the Brethren took the Bible at face value, he also notes their openness to receive assistance by those who understood the biblical languages.<sup>130</sup> He describes their Bible reading method as being a "straightforward, commonsense manner."<sup>131</sup> Their desire for an informed reading points back to their very beginnings when Alexander Mack studied "trustworthy histories" that would offer more guidance in forming the new *Gemeinde*.<sup>132</sup> In addition to this example, the Early Brethren further demonstrated an interest for an informed reading when they adjusted their communion service by placing footwashing before love feast in the service. Durnbaugh describes this event:

He (Alexander Mack Jr.) first described how they had washed feet after the meal and the breaking of the bread, and then how, after they "saw a little nearer," they washed feet before the breaking of bread. "Then when Reitz published the New Testament, and a brother came among us, who understood Greek, and pointed out to us properly, how Jesus washed feet before supper."<sup>133</sup>

This desire for an informed reading by further study was by no means required by all believers. It can generally be stated that the Early Brethren were uneducated. However, to compensate for this they believed that the "Holy Spirit would assist the faithful."<sup>134</sup>

In addition to the outer Word and the inner Word, there is also a third factor to be considered, i.e., the community. While the Early Brethren read the outer Word, they relied upon the inner Word for spiritual illumination. However, Bible study was not an individual prospect. The *Gemeinde* played a central role in the comprehension of scripture. Much like the Pietists and Anabaptists, the Early Brethren studied the Bible as a community. Yet unlike the Radical Pietists they did not accept any free interpretation and scripture was the basis of faith.<sup>135</sup> If the validating factor for interpretation was not based upon methodology, then what was the controlling factor for biblical interpretation in the Early Brethren community? In essence it was a combination of three components: the written word (outer Word), the Holy Spirit (inner Word), and the community. The community shaped the interpretation process by the convictions that it held. These convictions, which arose from Bible study and life experience, also served to shape the way that the

Early Brethren read and understood scripture. For instance, their conviction of possessing an attitude of "openness" when studying the Bible liberated the scriptures from formalistic methods.<sup>136</sup> This conviction affected an openness in the interpretation process. In addition to this it must be emphasized that the Early Brethren practiced Bible study in community. Durnbaugh expresses both the significance of community and of openness, saying, "One reason that they rejected creeds was that they had a lively expectation that God had more light yet to break through the pages of scripture as they studied it together."<sup>137</sup>

### *A Threefold Interrelationship*

Therefore the Early Brethren Bible reading method could be summarized as a threefold interrelationship<sup>138</sup> between the written (outer) Word, the Holy Spirit (inner Word), and the community. While the new *Gemeinde* read the scripture in a straightforward, commonsense manner, the Holy Spirit (inner Word) convicts the *Gemeinde* to respond pragmatically. Yet the interpretation of the scripture is consequently controlled by the convictions of the community, which originally arose from prayer and study in the context of their historical background (shared experiences). In this sense the Spirit-led community shapes the interpretation of the scripture. It must be understood that for the Early Brethren, only the person and thus the community who is illumined by the Spirit can understand and believe the scriptures.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, the Early Brethren, having shared particular experiences including specific convictions by the Holy Spirit through scripture, have a distinctive approach to scripture. In other words, the Early Brethren being a Spirit-led community, approached scripture from a particular and distinctive perspective, thus affecting particular scriptural interpretations.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose for this paper has been to define the hermeneutical perspective of the Early Brethren; to define and describe both Radical Pietism and Anabaptism, which essentially contribute to the Brethren identity and thus their perspective; and finally to describe how the Early Brethren interpreted scripture. In the process of these descriptions I have argued against any simplistic definition of the Early Brethren, specifically as being either Anabaptist or Radical Pietist. While the Early Brethren certainly possess characteristics of both and share similar convictions with both Anabaptism and Radical Pietism, neither term adequately defines them. It has been demonstrated that the first eight brothers and sisters left the established churches (6 from the Reformed church and 2 from the Lutheran) and joined the loosely affiliated Radical Pietists led by Ernst Christoph Hochmann von

Hochenau. Essentially the Early Brethren were a group of Radical Pietists who became disenchanted with the state church and who had broken completely away from it. Then following substantial prayer and scriptural study, they decided to form a *Gemeinde* of brothers and sisters sharing in adult baptism by immersion. This brief summary of their development illustrates both the Radical Pietist and Anabaptist influence upon the Early Brethren. However following these descriptions, the question arises as to the extent to which both contributed to the Early Brethren identity and the interaction that occurs between them in the process.

Therefore, special attention was given to Vernard Eller's argument that the Brethren identity is a dialectic tension between Pietism and Anabaptism. This dialectic tension, he argued, is not a Hegelian one, but rather a relational tension. His argument was based upon the assumptions that a tension exists between Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. The tension takes form in that Anabaptism emphasizes outer obedience over inner spirituality and Radical Pietism vice versa. Their interaction occurs as they mutually reinforce one another through a series of checks and balances. However, by demonstrating the inability of the dialectic tension to describe the complexity of Early Brethren identity and by challenging the nature of Eller's dialectic tension, I have argued that the tension existing between Radical Pietism and Anabaptism is not inner/outer but is individualism/community.

Finally, I argued that the Early Brethren approached scripture in a "straightforward manner;" that they read the scriptures applying common sense. I also argued that while they possessed a somewhat unique understanding of scriptural authority, they also held an openness to being enlightened to new truths as they were led by the Holy Spirit. Noting the similarities between Archer's "tridactic interrelationship" model of scriptural interpretation with that of the Early Brethren, I argued that their reading method was best described as a threefold interrelationship between the written word, the Holy Spirit, and the community.

In the process defining the hermeneutical perspective of the CoB, this thesis has thus far sketched the historical narrative of the CoB and has answered the questions regarding the Early Brethren hermeneutical perspective, the nature of the their identity, and how they interpreted scripture.

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Mack, "The First Brethren Tract," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1991), 9.

<sup>2</sup>William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction*

to *Biblical Interpretation*. (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1991), 4.

<sup>3</sup>H. W. Fowler, F. G. Fowler, and Della Thompson, editors, *Oxford Concise English Dictionary*. Ninth edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1055.

<sup>4</sup>In his thesis, "Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews Dissertation, 2001), Kenneth J. Archer argues that there are "central narrative convictions" within a community which explain "why the community exists," who the community is, and "how they fit into the larger scheme of Christian history." Archer's argument is an expansion of Douglas Jacobson's work "Pentecostal Hermeneutics in Comparative Hermeneutical Perspective." Jacobson's work lays the foundation for acknowledging the significance of hermeneutical communities and that each of these communities possess a distinctive identity which shapes the particular perspective by which they read scripture. It has been only recently that Pentecostalism has begun discussing or at least acknowledging the community as a hermeneutical lens through which perception (particularly the scriptures) is negotiated. In much the same manner I will argue that the core convictions of the Early Brethren are the hermeneutical lens through which they read scripture. In addition these convictions are in essence central narrative convictions in that they emerge out of the narratives of Early Brethren faith experience.

<sup>5</sup>This concept of "creating meaning" requires further explanation. While not accepting the extreme conclusion of Stephen Fowl's argument in *Engaging Scripture* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), which argues that a text has no meaning or that it is "underdetermined," this writer uses this with the understanding that a text is a pool of potential meaning. Admittedly, the term "meaning" offers ambiguity in formal discussions. However, Kenneth J. Archer argues in his thesis, "Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," that meaning is a byproduct of a "tridactic" interrelationship which occurs as a person in community being led by the Spirit engages the text of scripture.

<sup>6</sup>Perhaps it is best to acknowledge that no one exists apart from community. Regardless of circumstances, individuals experience some sort of cultural community, thus making them parts of community and hermeneuts whose perception is shaped by the community.

<sup>7</sup>While this study focuses upon the two primary sources of identity, from which the Brethren come, namely, Anabaptism and Pietism, it is necessary to also recognize that some scholars include the Reformed tradition in their formula. This is based upon the fact that six of the first eight Brethren left the Reformed church with the Radical Pietist movement. Thus both Dale Stoffer and Donald Durnbaugh include the Reformed tradition as playing a central

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role in the forming of the Brethren identity. It is not the intention of this study to ignore the Reformed influence. This study presupposes that the Early Brethren predominantly moved out of the Reformed tradition into Pietism, then into Radical Pietism, and finally formed a new *Gemeinde*. The minimal noting of Reformed influence is due to the radical protestation of the Reformed tradition. However it is also presupposed that the Brethren share many basic theological understandings due simply to the origin of the Early Brethren.

<sup>8</sup>The form of Pietism primarily relevant to this study is German Pietism. It is necessary to clarify this point due to the multifaceted nature of Pietism. Admittedly, Pietism was not limited to the European Continent, but also arose in Great Britain and North America.

<sup>9</sup>William G. Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1999), 27.

<sup>10</sup>F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 18. Stoeffler also points out five themes that Francke continually emphasized and which Pietists also continued: trials, cross-bearing, obedience to God's law, trust in God, and joy (19). Each of these continually resurface in Francke's sermons.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>12</sup>See Chauncey David Ensign, *Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)*. (Boston University Dissertation, 1955), 84.

<sup>13</sup>Andrew Landale Drummond, *German Protestantism Since Luther*. (London: Epworth Press, 1951), 56. What Drummond means by "spiritual intelligence" is the intellectual understanding of what one professes through prayer and devotion. In his text, Drummond expresses this through a comparison between what he calls the spiritually intelligent and those who are spiritually ignorant by saying "even in the Reformed Palatinate the ignorant prayed 'deliver us from the Kingdom' and in the Creed declared that Christ was 'pansified under Pilate.'"

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 151.

<sup>16</sup>Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*, 30.



<sup>17</sup>Mack, "The First Brethren Tract," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*, 9-14. In his first tract, Mack explains the origins of the Early Brethren convictions.

<sup>18</sup>Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 15.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* See also Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*, 17-18.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>27</sup>Ensign, *Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)*. 407.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

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

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 174-176.

<sup>32</sup>Ensign labels this doctrinal belief, "Sophia-mysticism and natural secrets" (409). This is based upon Boehme's claim that Sophia revealed divine secrets about nature to him.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>34</sup>Hans L. Martensen and Stephen Hobhouse, *Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), Studies in his Life and Teachings*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 24. As cited in Ensign, *Radical German Pietism*, 36.

<sup>35</sup>Ensign, *Radical German Pietism*, 409.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 230-231.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>This stage is described in such a way as to sound monistic in essence. However, the understanding of this union with God is more attuned to the same sense found among Pietists who, as Stoffer describes, as a believer "is united with Christ in a psychological and volitional union." Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 17.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 411.

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

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>This is of particular significance because the majority of Early Brethren left the Reformed tradition as briefly mentioned in chapter one.

<sup>49</sup>Ensign, *Radical German Pietism*, 413-414.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 414.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 415.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 416.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*. 35.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>61</sup>Heinz Renkewitz, *Hochmann von Hochenau: 1670-1721*. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1993), 32.

<sup>62</sup>Renkewitz, *Hochmann von Hochenau (1670 - 1721)*, 34-35. "1) The basic principle is the expectation of the imminent return of Christ . . . 2) The new priesthood means a conquest of the former traditional priesthood . . . 3) The new priests are bound together in one order . . . 4) The loosing of all natural ties is the precondition for those who are ordained into the new priesthood . . . 5) The task of the new priests consists of sanctification for self and of sacrificial prayer for others . . . 6) Hochmann recognizes his special task to be that of warning of highly placed persons, kings, princes, and counts of the coming judgment, and leading them to a personal conversion before it is too late." Number two of the distinguishing characteristics uses the term "priesthood." It refers to the universal priesthood of all believers and it is used in the specific sense of Ernst Hochmann and Samuel König as instituting a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Willoughby notes that it is similar to the order instituted by the Philadelphian Society of England (101).

<sup>63</sup>See Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*. 39.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid. It is necessary to note that while Radical Pietists worshipped together and even lived in communal settings, the individualism that existed among them in contrast to the Anabaptists was the lack of accountability. Radical Pietists believed themselves accountable to no human institution nor assembly, they found their accountability only in the

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leading of the inner light. Radical Pietists were loosely affiliated with one another and often developed different beliefs. Alexander Mack expresses his criticism of this lack of accountability by answering Gruber's question regarding whether Brethren possessed more love before their baptism. He answers saying that they did not possess more love "unless this meant the simulated love which is feigned for the sake of bread or honor, and which does not punish sins or errors. This kind of love says: 'Leave me alone in my own will, opinion, and actions, and I will leave you alone in yours; we will love each other and be brethren.' . . . Unfortunately, we stayed long enough in this pernicious hypocritical love, while we were still among the Pietists." "Basic Questions," 38.

<sup>65</sup>Donald Durnbaugh, *Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Eighteenth Century Europe*. (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, 1992), 64.

<sup>66</sup>Ensign, *Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)*. 276-291.

<sup>67</sup>Vernard Eller, "On Epitomizing the Brethren." *Brethren Life and Thought*, VI, no. 4 (1961): 48. In this article, Eller, provides a convincing argument that suggests that an Aeither-or" approach to the question of Anabaptism or Pietism is incorrect. Very pointedly he says, "At heart, Brethrenism is a dialectic relationship, not a static principle" (48). He further clarifies this claim as to avoid any Hegelian sense of synthesis. He says that the tension that exists between the two points is the "actual creative point of focus" (48).

<sup>68</sup>Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*. 42.

<sup>69</sup>Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*. 68.

<sup>70</sup>Ensign, *Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)*. 411. Under his summary of "Bible and inspiration," he implies this openness when he says, "they no more thought that the day of revelation was over than that the age of grace was past." To support that this conviction of "openness," which was held by the Radical Pietists, had an impact upon the Early Brethren is expressed when Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 49, describes the Early Brethren biblicism as follows: "One reason that they rejected creeds was that they had a lively expectation that God had more light yet to break through the pages of scripture as they studied together."

<sup>71</sup>For the Early Brethren, scripture is the test of the inner witness. Martin Schrag explains that "scripture is the basis for judging the validity of a person's Christianity" ("Early Brethren Concept of Authority," *BLT*. IX: Fall: 1964: 116). And the Early Brethren readily used scripture in this way when interacting with those outside their community.

<sup>72</sup>This final doctrinal conviction is the view that God will certainly punish unbelieving sinners for their sin, but ultimately His love would overcome restoring them and bringing them into the "final state of blessedness." Alexander Mack is cautious in his teaching of this doctrine, stating, "Therefore, that is a much better and more blessed gospel which teaches how to escape the wrath of God than the gospel which teaches that eternal punishment has an end." "Rights and Ordinances," 98.

<sup>73</sup>Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*. 57.

<sup>74</sup>See Durnbaugh, *The Believer's Church*. (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1968); Durnbaugh, *Brethren Beginnings: the Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Eighteenth Century Europe*; Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*; Ensign, "Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)"; Ernst Crous, "Anabaptism, Pietism, Rationalism and German Mennonites," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*. (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1957), 237-248; F. Ernst Stoeffler *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), includes the Early Brethren among the Anabaptists while acknowledging their relationship to Hochmann von Hochenau, thus again accentuating the sometimes confusing similarities between the two groups; Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*.

<sup>75</sup>Ernst Crous, "Anabaptism, Pietism, Rationalism and German Mennonites," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*. (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1957), 240-241. In this article, Crous cites and expands Friedmann, who observes two primary similarities between Pietism and Anabaptism. Friedmann says that Pietists and Anabaptists share two fundamental rejections, 1) the state church, and 2) confessional dogmatism. Crous goes on to delineate the differences between the two as being primarily that of "emphasis." He says, "Anabaptism stresses the fear of God (*Gottesfurcht*), Christian discipleship, following Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*) in love and the cross, and the fellowship of the unity of the Spirit (*Gemeinschaft der Geisteseinheit*). Pietism, on the other hand, stresses *Gottseligkeit*, a blissful devotional experience which enjoys the assurance of individual salvation; *praxis pietatis* in daily life, blissful form of devotion, together with a mild friendliness and morality, as well as the fellowship of the regenerated" (241). As can be seen, fundamental differences between the two are predominantly expressed in the tone of the description.

<sup>76</sup>Donald K.. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 9. In this work McKim defines Anabaptism as, "those who advocated rebaptism in certain instances. Most prominently, the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers who renounced infant baptism, stressed the literal reading of scripture, and supported separation of church and state." As can be observed this definition fails to express the significant contributions of Anabaptism to Christianity. Many definitions seem to home in on two or three characteristics, while failing to acknowledge the most significant tenets of their doctrinal beliefs, i.e. nonresistance, brotherly love, praxis-oriented faith, radical

discipleship, etc. Perhaps the most ironic result of their nonresistance is that they have been universally labeled "Anabaptists," a term used by the established church to scornfully describe them.

<sup>77</sup>Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*, 42. Interestingly enough, C. Arnold Snyder uses remarkably similar language describing the Anabaptist movement. He says, "Anabaptism was a reform movement born at the time and in the context of the Protestant Reformation, an unwanted and unloved 'stepchild' of the mainline reformers . . ." *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*. (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>79</sup>Willoughby (51) cites Franklin Littell's definition from *The Anabaptist View of the Church: a Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), xviii. This understanding can be expanded further as the early Anabaptists believed themselves to be the true church and had completely and enthusiastically committed themselves to the body of Christ on earth. Snyder (*Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, 1ff.) points out the negative connotations that the term Anabaptism carried with it. This group of committed believers were thus labeled with a term used to categorize one of the two heresies warranting death. It is interesting that while term literally means "re-baptizer," the Anabaptists considered themselves merely Baptists because they were convinced that infant baptism was not baptism.

<sup>80</sup>Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, 83.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 90. Snyder notes that the majority of doctrinal emphasis lies within their ecclesiology.

<sup>83</sup>Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*, 46.

<sup>84</sup>Willoughby cites Alexander Mack Jr. from Henry Kurtz' *The Brethren's Encyclopedia, Containing the United Counsels and Conclusions of the Brethren, at their Annual Meetings*. (Columbiana: Henry Kurtz, 1867).

<sup>85</sup>Alexander Mack, "Basic Questions," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1991), 37.

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<sup>86</sup>Harold S. Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," *Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), 42.

<sup>87</sup>See Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*, 56.

<sup>88</sup>Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 56.

<sup>89</sup>Alexander Mack, "Basic Questions," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*, 37.

<sup>90</sup>In Mack's tract, "Basic Questions," he responds to questions of doctrine posed by Eberhard Gruber (A leader of the Inspirationists movement in Germany) concerning the Early Brethren *Gemeinde*. As to this particular quotation, Mack was responding to Gruber's question (question #33), "Do you regard your church as superior to those of all other Baptist-Minded (*Taufgesinnte*) of these or previous times, and if so, in which way and why?" Mack's answer to this is, "It is true that we consider our church fellowship superior to these now-deteriorated Baptists (Mennonites), with whom we are acquainted, and whom we know. The reason is that they have deteriorated in doctrine and life, and have strayed far from the doctrine and life of the old Baptists (Anabaptists). Many of them notice this and realize it themselves. We cannot answer concerning the previous Baptists, because we did not know them in life. We are completely agreed with them as far as their doctrine is concerned, which does not teach anything in contradiction to the gospel." Alexander Mack, "Basic Questions," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*, 37.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Interestingly enough this same judgment has been made against the Pietists as was earlier stated.

<sup>93</sup>Stoffer cites Gottfried Arnold [*Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-historie*. Vol. 1 (Schaffhausen: Emanuel and Benedict Hurter, 1740). 1:2, 16, 21, 7:859; 1:2, 16, 21, 39:874; 2:2, 17, 12, 31:167], *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 57. It is important to note that C. Arnold Snyder convincingly disputes this claim asserting that there were a diversity of biblical approaches among the distinctive Anabaptist communities, thus disallowing any overarching statements regarding an Anabaptist hermeneutic (Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, 161). Moreover, Snyder begins his argument regarding this issue stating that there was both a diversity in methodology and a consensus regarding the interpretative tradition which directly affects the "hermeneutical perspective" (159, 365-376). While Snyder's criticism may be inherently correct, the fact of the matter was that the Brethren acknowledged and affirmed this criticism thus establishing themselves as a distinctive identity wholly separate from the Anabaptist

community.

<sup>94</sup>Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries: Its Genius and its Literature*. (Goshen: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), 217.

<sup>95</sup>Ensign, *Radical German Pietism (c. 1675 - c. 1760)*. 278.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*, 56.

<sup>98</sup>Eller, "On Epitomizing the Brethren," 48.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>100</sup>C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*. (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995), 299ff.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>102</sup>Carl F. Bowman, *Brethren Society*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995), 46.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, 42.

<sup>105</sup>Schrag, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," 121.

<sup>106</sup>Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," 81-82.

<sup>107</sup>Dumbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 49.

<sup>108</sup>Cited in Willoughby, *The Beliefs of the Early Brethren 1706-1735*, 30. In this passage, Willoughby cites Phillip Schaff as saying that Pietism by "granting the 'awakened' Christian full capacity for independent study of the Bible, Pietism restored to laymen the right which they had lost." Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), IX, 62.



<sup>109</sup>As has been characterized by Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 17.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108-109.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>113</sup>Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 17.

<sup>114</sup>John C. Wenger, "Biblicism of the Anabaptists," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*. (Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1957), 170-171.

<sup>115</sup>In his journal article, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority" (114), Martin Schrag expresses the extent of this shift as well as its significance. He says, "The basic thrust of the letter is that of obedience and discipleship to the teachings and example of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the authority. It is absolutely necessary to be baptized according to the example, the command, and the teaching of Jesus Christ and the apostles. It is necessary to 'publicly profess that which Christ Jesus taught and did without hesitation or fear of men.' Nothing is better than obedience. The disciples sealed their obedience with their blood. All righteousness must be fulfilled. Obedience is so important that those who do not obey have no God. The test of the faith is obedience. Obedience is necessary for salvation." This underscores the extent to which the Early Brethren understood the interrelationship of faith and obedience.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>117</sup>Here Schrag (ibid., 122) explains the relationship of the "inner" and "outer" Word, while quoting Alexander Mack as cited in Durnbaugh's *European Origins of the Brethren*. (Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1958), 385. Mack says, "No one may say to a believer that he should and must believe and obey the Scriptures, because no one can be a believer without the Holy Spirit. . . That which the Holy Spirit ordained for the faithful was written outwardly. All believers are united in it, for the Holy Spirit teaches them inwardly just as the Scriptures teach them outwardly." (The previous quotation is also found in Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*, 83.) This discussion clearly reflects the effect Reformed (Calvin) tradition had upon the Brethren. In chapter 7 of his *Institutes*. (Albany: Ages Software, 1997), 100, Calvin discusses the necessity of the Holy Spirit's testimony upon the individual as a prerequisite for understanding the Holy Scriptures.

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<sup>118</sup>Both Schrag, "Early Brethren Concept of Authority," and Dumbaugh, "Brethren and the Authority of Scripture," *BLT*, 13:1968, 170-183, express the necessity of both the "inner Word" and "outer Word" as authoritative. According to both, the "outer Word" is dependent upon the inward testimony of the "inner Word" so that the individual encountering the scripture might understand the message. It is necessary to note that the Brethren belief regarding the "inner Word" insists that its ministry upon the individual is not limited to illumination but is inclusive of empowering the individual to obeying the Word. It is necessary to note here that this is a primary distinguishing factor between the Anabaptists (Mennonites) and the Early Brethren. In John Wenger's article, "Biblicism of the Anabaptists," he states that "they followed rigorously the principle of *sola scriptura*: only the Bible is to be followed" [*Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), 171.]. Wenger further expresses this citing Harold Bender, saying, "It alone was authoritative for doctrine and life, for all worship and activity, for all church regulations and discipline." Dale Stoffer argues that the Brethren also were in full agreement with the "great Reformation" principle, *sola scriptura* (*Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 71). However, while it is true that the Early Brethren affirmed this principle, it does not necessarily mean they shared the same understanding of it. Unlike the Anabaptists, the Early Brethren held the supreme authority as resting in "God as revealed in Jesus Christ" rather than in scripture alone. In Early Brethrenism there is always a sense that the Spirit is involved in interpretation. While I generally agree with Stoffer that all the strands of the Reformation considered the scriptures as normative and divine, I must also acknowledge that the Early Brethren's sense of authority was more complex in that it anticipated new understandings to be revealed within the scripture through the ministry of the "Inner Word." Theirs was not a simple pragmatic literalism. The Early Brethren recognized the role and experience of the inner workings of the Spirit of Christ.

<sup>119</sup>Richard B. Gardner, "Brethren and the Bible," *BLT*, 28:1983, 7-8. The significance of this list as Gardner notes, is that the Brethren "generally resisted attempts to separate God's authority and scriptural authority" (8).

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup>Schrag, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," 119.

<sup>122</sup>Mack, "Basic Questions," 24-25.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>Wenger, "Biblicism of the Anabaptists," 176. Wenger describes their view as follows: "The Anabaptists regarded scripture as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. But they placed a strong emphasis upon the preparatory role of the Old Testament. They felt that God's final word was in the New Testament, not in the preparatory dispensation of the Old."

<sup>126</sup>Schrag, "The Early Brethren Concept of Authority," 115.

<sup>127</sup>Richard B. Gardner, "Bible," *The Brethren Encyclopedia*. (Philadelphia: The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc., 1983), 134.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*, 83.

<sup>130</sup>Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 49.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

<sup>132</sup>Durnbaugh, *Brethren Beginnings: The Origin of the Church of the Brethren in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 21.

<sup>133</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Brethren and the Authority of Scriptures," *BLT*, 13:1968, 174.

<sup>134</sup>Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 49.

<sup>135</sup>While Radical Pietists resisted a scriptural basis for faith, as is expressed by Alexander Mack in "Rights and Ordinances," (81ff), for the Early Brethren "The true faith which is genuine and which is promised eternal life must be a Scriptural faith . . ." (80).

<sup>136</sup>In describing the Pietistic approach to scripture, Stoffer says that it "quite effectively freed the Scriptures from any formalistic methods of interpretation." *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1850-1987*, 17.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>This concept of a three way negotiation for meaning was first offered by Kenneth J. Archer in his doctoral thesis. In it he describes this process as follows: "The role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process is to lead and guide the community in understanding the present meaningfulness of Scripture. . . Thus the Spirit does speak and has

more to say than just Scripture. This requires the community to discern the Spirit in the process of negotiating the meaning of the biblical texts as the community faithfully carries on the mission of Jesus into new, different and future contexts. . . For this reason, the voice of the Spirit cannot be reduced to simple recitation of Scripture, nonetheless it will be connected to the concerned Scripture" ("Forging a New Path: A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," 213-214). While this description is specifically targeted toward the Pentecostal community, it rings especially true for the Early Brethren community. Their openness to new understandings predisposes the willingness to allow the Spirit to lead their community into new understandings. Moreover this model remains anchored to scripture, thus alleviating the Early Brethren concern of falling into Radical Pietist excesses. For the purpose of clarity, I have opted to describe the interrelationship between the Spirit, scripture, and community as being a "threefold" interrelationship.

<sup>139</sup>Mack, "Rights and Ordinances," *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*, 83.