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SPRING 2014

REFORMED
THEOLOGY AMONG
CANADIAN
MENNONITE
BRETHREN

—BY DR. BRIAN COOPER

Student and Alumni Profiles

MEET JOSÉ-LUIS MORAGA

& KARA BERGSTROM





MB BIBLICAL
SEMINARY

LIFELONG LEARNING

FOR

LIFELONG MISSION

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THE IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM IMPACT OF *Seminary Education*



The December 2013 issue of *Christianity Today* carried the story of New Life Church in Colorado Springs after the public disgrace of Ted Haggard in late 2006. The article explores how a once influential evangelical mega-church congregation managed to right-size itself after descending into organizational chaos, major debt (\$26M) and a precipitous decline in attendance (almost 50% from its peak of 14,000). It did so by intentionally adjusting a variety of practices such as de-emphasizing involvement in political campaigns, incorporating aspects of traditional liturgy into corporate worship, listening to those who were “de-converted” by the congregation’s scandals, becoming more outwardly oriented and involved in community service, and, what particularly caught my eye was, sending its pastors to seminary. Very few New Life pastors had much theological education. They began enrolling in graduate programs where they “learned for the first time about hermeneutics, biblical history, and social theory. New Life ideology, long determined by the freewheeling personality and politics of a senior pastor, is now centered on insights and objections drawn from a host of teachers and scholars beyond its walls: Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Stott, Stanley Hauerwas, N.T. Wright, and – perhaps most important for pastoral practices – Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*.” Although the article didn’t set out to highlight the relationship between seminary education and effective pastoral ministry, the message is hard to miss.

MBBS Canada is part of a longstanding Mennonite Brethren tradition that recognizes the critical relationship between education and effective mission. I’m sometimes asked by both conference leaders and donors,

“What difference would it make if MBBS Canada no longer existed?”

A recent study of MBBS Canada alumni in British Columbia revealed that 67 (22%) individuals out of 306 pastoral staff positions in the BC Mennonite Brethren Conference had received some theological education through MBBS (almost entirely from the Langley campus). Two-thirds (45) of the 67 individuals currently employed in pastoral positions in BC Mennonite Brethren congregations completed an entire degree program: put differently, at least 40% of the Mennonite Brethren congregations in BC have an MBBS graduate as part of their pastoral staff. The impact of MBBS extends well beyond pastoral ministry within Mennonite Brethren congregations in BC: at least 28 MBBS Canada (Langley campus) graduates are employed in other Mennonite Brethren ministries, and another 32 are employed by non-Mennonite

Brethren ministries. As I observe pastors and leaders within the Mennonite Brethren conference and congregations, I am repeatedly struck by the general observation that those individuals who have been shaped and influenced by MBBS Canada tend to be more aware of their Mennonite Brethren theological identity, often generate less conflict, last longer, contribute more deeply to conference life, and are deeply loved by their congregations. It is fair to say that the quality and longevity of pastoral ministry within the Canadian Conference would look very different without the presence of MBBS Canada campuses in Langley and Winnipeg.

The apostle Paul instructed his young student Timothy:

“...my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

This describes the purpose for which MBBS Canada exists, namely to educate and equip leaders who are able to help Mennonite Brethren congregations achieve the mission of reaching the people of our country (and beyond) with the good news of Jesus Christ.

As you browse through the pages of this issue, I’d invite you to take a moment to pray for the faculty, staff and students of MBBS Canada. Preparing pastors and leaders for the present and the future is a sacred calling: we want each graduate to have a real and passionate relationship with Jesus, to have a deep understanding of the Bible and theology, and to have skills for effective pastoral leadership. The challenge of reaching the people of Canada has never been greater. †



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Bruce L. Guenther". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bruce L. Guenther, PhD
President, MBBS Canada

NEWS & UPDATES

MBBS CANADA at ACTS

The startup period at MBBS-ACTS is coming to a close and is now shifting into a higher gear of operational effectiveness. MBBS-ACTS is generating significant institutional momentum.

MBBS-ACTS personnel continue to be actively engaged in the consortium. Bruce Guenther, Randy Wolff, and Brian Cooper serve on program committees. In addition, Jeff Peters and Sherman Lau are actively engaged in the life of the seminary community. As major contributors to the life of ACTS, we are making the MBBS presence felt across the consortium. MBBS faculty are also part of larger spheres of activity on campus.

As well, student participation in class and extracurricular events seems to indicate a high level of student satisfaction. This past fall, chapel services were more robustly attended and supported than any semester in recent memory. Our current student body at the Langley campus is 86 (as of Fall 2013) enrolled primarily in the MDiv, MACS and MAMFT programs. We also admitted 32 new students for the 2013-2014 academic year. This April, 13 MBBS students are scheduled to graduate, representing 6 of the programs at ACTS.

MBBS EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

MINISTRYLIFT

After the success of the first MinistryLift conference, the follow-up, the MinistryLift Small Group conference, took place February 28th to March 1st, 2014. Organized by Randy Wolff, the conference will feature several Mennonite Brethren leaders including Randy, Sherman Lau, Ron Toews, Daniel Beutler, and Dennis Wilkinson. As with the first conference, this event will be live-streamed to allow for non-location-specific participation. Randy Wolff is to be commended for his excellent work developing MinistryLift.

DISTRIBUTED LEARNING COURSES AT MBBS CANADA

The first round of online courses were offered to ACTS students through CMU, and the offering was a modest success. This semester, Pierre Gilbert is teaching OT Theology through CMU, while Brian Cooper is offering Mennonite Brethren Convictions through ACTS. The flexibility of online courses is perceived to be a shortcoming by students, as they are looking for higher levels of personal interaction than what is currently available through online course delivery and forum participation. In order to provide more meaningful interaction for students, Brian Cooper has incorporated a weekly, 60-90 minute videoconference into Mennonite Brethren Convictions for students who are able to participate. The focus of the interaction is a discussion of the week's study questions and, so far, the interaction time has proven itself to be stimulating and seems to have been well received.

Plans are already underway to offer more of the course for 2014-15, as well as to create a rotation for the ongoing implementation of the online curriculum. Ray Bystrom is presently scheduled to teach NT Theology in Summer 2014 (May-August), and other courses will be implemented as they are available.

MBBS INVOLVEMENT IN CCMBC EVENTS

PASTORS CREDENTIALING ORIENTATION

Bruce Guenther and Brian Cooper continue to be deeply involved in the review and planning of our annual Pastors' Credentialing Orientation. The consistent feedback from attendees is that Pastors Credentialing Orientation is tremendously valuable, however, the orientation program is ever searching for ways in which to improve. This year's Pastors Credentialing Orientation will take place in Langley during June 9th-11th, 2014.

CCMBC STUDY CONFERENCE

MBBS Canada was prominent in this year's study conference. Pierre Gilbert was on the planning committee that selected the plenary speakers and was the key liaison to the speakers leading up to the conference. Brian Cooper served on the planning committee as the chair of the Board of Faith and Life.

RESOURCING CHURCHES, DEVELOPING LEADERS/ LEADERS2LEARNERS

MBBS personnel have been in conversation with L2L staff about how to cooperate with L2L in the development of educational priorities, and also as resource people upon whom L2L could call for direction as their expertise is required.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

I have found great joy in my work at MBBS-ACTS. The encouraging and constructive atmosphere in the MBBS-ACTS office, coupled with the strong sense of where we need to focus our missional energies, makes for a great working environment. I am continually reminded that theological education is not the goal of MBBS Canada. Mission is the goal; education is the means by which to accomplish that goal.

I am also looking forward to feedback for my article, "Reformed Theology Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren," which is in the latest issue of Direction. If you read it, drop me a line and give me your honest reflections. My hope is to foster an honest and mutually enriching conversation that will clarify and focus our missional identity as Mennonite Brethren.

Northwest Baptist Seminary, one of our partner schools within ACTS, is sponsoring a conference February 7th-8th, 2014, entitled "Centering Gospel Between Church and Culture," featuring D. A. Carson as plenary speaker. I have been asked to lead a breakout session and it is called "Gospel and Culture: A Believer's Church Perspective." †



Dr. Brian Cooper
MBBS Canada at ACTS Associate Dean

MBBS CANADA at CMU

NEW LIBRARY

According to CMU president, Cheryl Pauls, the construction of the new library building and the bridge across Grant Avenue are on schedule and on budget. The completion of these projects will help make CMU and MBBS even more attractive to graduate students.

NEW VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC

After six years of service, Earl Davey will be retiring as CMU's Vice President Academic at the end of this academic year. Earl has been a tremendous gift for MBBS and the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren constituency. His experience at Tyndale Seminary, and his knowledge of the Mennonite Brethren constituency, have highly contributed to the development of the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry and the development of a MBBS presence at CMU.

Gordon Zerbe has recently been appointed as VP academic, effective June 2014. Gordon has been with CMU since its inception and has served in a number of key positions at the university, most notably as Vice President and Academic Dean for CMU's Shaftesbury campus from 2004-2007. He is well acquainted with the Mennonite Brethren constituency and many of its institutions (he received his MA from MBBS Fresno).

ANDREW DYCK

MBBS' most recent faculty appointment, Andrew Dyck, continues to play a key role in the delivery of pastoral training to our students. He is presently teaching a new course entitled "Mission and Evangelism." One of the strong points of interest about this course is the integration of a field component that involves visits to a number of churches. This field component works to provide our students with the opportunity to explore a variety of outreach strategies with key church leaders. Andrew also continues to work with the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba with regard to the Prayer Resourcing project he started in the fall.

ONLINE COURSES

MBBS offered its first-ever online courses at CMU. In the fall of 2013, MBBS offered the "Mennonite Brethren Story," with Brian Froese. As for the 2013-2014 winter semester, Pierre Gilbert is offering "Old Testament Theology."

MBBS INTENSIVE COURSE

MBBS faculty member, Randy Wolff, will be in Winnipeg to offer the course "Power, Change, and Conflict" on February 17th-21st, 2014.

STUDENTS

A total of nine students are registered in the MBBS/CMU program. Among those, two are presently completing a chaplaincy residency program at the Riverview Health Centre in Winnipeg. The Graduate School of Theology and Ministry has a total of 30 students admitted to its various programs, of whom 18 self-identify as Mennonite Brethren. †



Dr. Pierre Gilbert
MBBS Canada at CMU Associate Dean

Student PROFILE:



—José-Luis Moraga—

JOSÉ-LUIS MORAGA

Master of Theological Studies

1. SHARE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF (HOMETOWN, FAMILY, WHAT YOU WERE DOING BEFORE ATTENDING SEMINARY, CURRENT ROLE) AND WHY YOU CHOSE TO ATTEND MBBS-CMU?

I'm from Santiago, Chile. I came to Canada three years ago with my wife, Karen, and my two daughters, Constanza and Sofia. During my last three years in Chile, I was an associate pastor in the "Rey de Glory Church" and a teacher in the "Centre for Theological Studies" in Santiago, Chile. Currently, I'm a MBBS/CMU full-time student in the Master of Theological Studies program, director of "EdénB," a Bible School for Hispanics in Winnipeg, and I'm doing my internship at Portage Avenue Church (Mennonite Brethren) as well. Following God's call, I chose MBBS/CMU because I wanted to pursue further studies in the Bible and theology.

2. HOW ARE YOU BEING EQUIPPED AND PREPARED FOR MINISTRY?

All my courses have allowed me to reflect theologically, delve into the scriptures, and engage that knowledge into my personal, family, and communal life. In doing my internship at PAC, I'm being challenged to find fresh ideas and ways to carry out the mission of the church in a multicultural, postmodern, and changing world. Thus, I see my theological training is equipping me not only academically, but practically as well.

3. WHAT IS AN EXPERIENCE THAT HAS IMPACTED YOU THEOLOGICALLY OR VOCATIONALLY (SURPRISES, STRUGGLES, SUCCESSES) IN YOUR STUDIES, THUS FAR?

Having cross-cultural experience is the most important thing that has impacted our lives because our understanding of God, the Gospel, and human problems has deepened. Therefore, we are getting a higher

perspective on ministry and receiving the necessary skills to serve God, church, and society by taking an active role in holistic mission and peacemaking.

4. TELL US ABOUT YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK AND HOW THIS HAS HELPED YOU DURING YOUR STUDIES?

I began my Masters degree as a CMU student. When MBBS partnered with CMU that was a huge blessing to me. MBBS is playing a significant role in my spiritual journey through mentoring meetings, prayers, building strong relationship between students and professors, encouragement, and supporting financially as well.

5. WHAT KIND OF MINISTRY OR VOCATION ARE YOU HOPING TO BE PREPARED FOR?

This is the most difficult question because of my social, ethnic, and church background. It's my desire to serve in God's kingdom through pastoral ministry and theological teaching, in order to help people to get a deeper understanding of God and his Gospel, and to encourage men and women to serve God and the world uncompromisingly wherever God leads them.

6. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OUR READERS ABOUT CONSIDERING SEMINARY STUDIES?

Whether somebody is being called by God to ministry, missions, teaching, or to serve in any other area of life such, it is essential to get some biblical and theological training not only to be an effective witness of God's grace in the world today, but to grow up in our understanding and relationship with God as well. Perhaps we will not get all the answers to our questions, but we will be better trained to serve God and humanity wherever God leads us. †

Alumni PROFILE:



– Kara Bergstrom –

KARA BERGSTROM

Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural Ministry

1. SHARE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF (HOMETOWN, FAMILY, WHAT YOU WERE DOING BEFORE ATTENDING SEMINARY, CURRENT ROLE) AND WHY YOU CHOSE TO ATTEND MBBS-ACTS?

I am originally from Kitchener, Ontario. At Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church, I grew up under the leadership of my senior pastor, Ron Toews, and Gareth Goossen, my youth/worship leader. After getting a B.A. in Psychology, my career goal was to become a counselor. All of that changed after a 1-year MCC internship in Mexico City. I fell in love with the language and culture and shifted my path to cross-cultural studies. When Gareth Goossen told me about the Leadership Matching Grant available at Mennonite Brethren Seminary/ACTS, I jumped at the chance to apply! My church at that time (The Dwelling Place) sponsored me with 25% of the tuition, the Mennonite Brethren Conference provided 50% of the tuition, and I was responsible for the final 25%. What an amazing gift and affirmation! I graduated with a Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural Ministry.

2. HOW WERE YOU EQUIPPED AND PREPARED FOR MINISTRY?

My Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural Ministry provided me with the academic expertise to become employed as the Director of Global Projects (Short-term Missions) on the undergraduate campus at Trinity Western University. From there, I worked as a Communications Writer in the international office at Mennonite Brethren Missions. Currently, I am thrilled to direct the Intercultural Studies program at Columbia Bible College (www.columbiabc.edu) in Abbotsford, BC. It's exciting to see all the doors that have opened as a result of getting my degree.

3. WHAT WAS AN EXPERIENCE THAT IMPACTED YOU BOTH THEOLOGICALLY AND VOCATIONALLY (SURPRISES, STRUGGLES, SUCCESSES) DURING YOUR TIME AT SEMINARY?

For an ethnography assignment, I chose to get to know the people of the Kwantlen Nation in Fort Langley, BC. I was impacted as I listened first-hand to stories of the continuing pain and suffering that radiated from past abuse in residential schools. Generations later, there remains a deep need for forgiveness and reconciliation. Clearly, only the power of the cross and the grace of the Holy Spirit can begin to transform decades of hatred and misunderstanding into fledgling bonds of friendship.

4. TELL US ABOUT YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK AND HOW IT HELPED YOU DURING YOUR STUDIES?

I enjoyed studying under my thesis advisor, Dr. Gordon Nickel. His broad missionary experience among Muslims in India, along with his extensive understanding of church history, opened my eyes to the many realities of sharing Christ across cultures. Dr. Bruce Guenther, Dr. Joanne Pepper, and Laurel McAllister were also instrumental in supporting and challenging me throughout the learning process.

5. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OUR READERS ABOUT CONSIDERING SEMINARY STUDIES?

My time at seminary was not just transformational in terms of exposure to broad theoretical knowledge and personal, spiritual challenge. I also made fantastic, deep friendships there that continue today, and for those friendships I am grateful. †

New Faculty & Staff Fun Facts

WHAT DO YOU DO ON YOUR DOWN TIME?

Jeff Peters: Play with my daughters, read good books, and watch EPL (and CFL, NFL, NHL).

Andrew Dyck: Read The Globe and Mail, play killer sudoku, and watch a detective show.

Bev Hardy: Crosswords, read, watch the Vancouver Canucks, and spend time with family.

IF YOU WERE STRANDED ON A DESERTED ISLAND, AND COULD ONLY HAVE THREE SUPPLIES, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Jeff Peters: Knife, hammock and a satellite phone.

IF YOU WERE STRANDED ON A DESERTED ISLAND, AND COULD ONLY HAVE THREE SUPPLIES, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Bev Hardy: First of all, if the island had snakes on it, I would not be stranded on it! If it were snake-free, three things I would take are: my Bible, my family, and music.



Jeff Peters

IF YOU WERE STRANDED ON A DESERTED ISLAND, AND COULD ONLY HAVE THREE SUPPLIES, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Andrew Dyck: Camera, hiking boots, and Psalms.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE CHILDHOOD MEMORY?

Jeff Peters: Eating smoked knackwurst and vinegar with my grandpa.

Andrew Dyck: My earliest childhood memory is of a vacation with my immediate family and cousins at Jewel Lake, BC. I can picture a blue rowboat resting on green grass beside the lake.

Bev Hardy: There are so many – one that particularly stands out is that every summer we would go to Osoyoos or Penticton for a week. With six children in our family, we didn't get to go away or even out to a restaurant very often, so this was very special. We would get to go to a restaurant only once that week (only twice a year). I remember that we would take our time reading everything on the menu, but always ordered the same thing – hamburgers!

WHAT'S A MEANINGFUL BIBLE VERSE FOR YOU AND WHY?

Jeff Peters: 2 Cor. 5:17 (NRSV or new NIV). I don't believe we should sum up the gospel, but if we had to, this is it.

WHAT'S A MEANINGFUL BIBLE VERSE FOR YOU AND WHY?

Andrew Dyck: In the fall, I was drawn to meditate on Jesus' message: "the kingdom of God is near – repent and believe the good news" (Mk 1:14). I prayed about the many ways in which I need to learn more about turning and trusting, because God's reign is here.

Bev Hardy: Jeremiah 29:11-13 – "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Because I have learned, the hard way, that no matter where we are in life, God is there to guide and protect us if we are willing. He only wants the best for us and will give us what we need, if we continually seek Him and listen for His voice.

WHAT JOBS HAVE YOU HELD IN THE PAST?

Jeff Peters: Window and door salesperson, pastor, and crew leader at a remanufacturing plant.

Andrew Dyck: They include cleaning brush in drainage ditches, pumping gas, physiotherapy, and pastoring.

Bev Hardy: Bank Teller, Long Term Disability Administrator, and Church Office Manager.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOVIE?

Jeff Peters: The Princess Bride.

Andrew Dyck: Master and Commander may be the only movie I've deliberately watched twice.

Bev Hardy: Anne of Green Gables.



Andrew Dyck



Bev Hardy

Reformed Theology Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren¹

By Dr. Brian Cooper

INTRODUCTION: WHY ARE WE HAVING THIS CONVERSATION?

*Who are the Mennonite Brethren?
Where do our roots lie, and where
are we going?*

The answers to these questions among Canadian Mennonite Brethren reveals concerns about theological identity, and particularly about the degree to which Canadian Mennonite Brethren have borrowed, and continue to borrow, from non-Mennonite evangelical groups. As Mennonite Brethren have become less a community linked by socio-cultural identity and more by theological commitments, the question of what those theological commitments are, and where they originate, becomes more pressing. The degree to which Canadian Mennonite Brethren ought to cooperate with non-Mennonites has been an ongoing theological conversation over time. In recent years, the stated identity of Canadian MBs, as members of a tradition that is built around a renewed awareness of the inherently evangelical dimension of Anabaptist convictions, has been confronted by a new theological reality in the form of a resurgent conservative Reformed evangelical agenda. This agenda, arising mainly from the United States, appears to threaten this harmony. What is more, from some voices in the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC) have come comments indicating that evangelical theology, especially that of the New Calvinist variety, is not easily reconciled with Anabaptist commitments. Rather than lament, I suggest that the responsible approach is to carefully appraise the claims being made so that one can arrive at a proper assessment. While New Calvinist influences could distract Canadian Mennonite Brethren from maintaining their holistic understanding of church mission and even cause denominational division, the evidence from the history of the CCMBC will show that this need not be the case. Rather, as has been true in the past, Mennonite Brethren can learn and be enriched by this theological tradition.

THE NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING

Theological terminology is frequently used colloquially, with little attempt to clarify what is meant. In many conversations, the terms neo-Reformed, Reformed, New Calvinist, and Calvinist are presumed to be synonymous. Those who are assumed to have association with Dispensational theology are also assumed to fall into the neo-Reformed/New Calvinist camp. On the other side of the conversation, a longstanding tendency has taken hold in Mennonite Brethren circles which asserts

the need to uphold authentic Anabaptist values in the face of the interdenominational cross-pollination that is increasingly common in the CCMBC. In the 1960s, leaders such as John A. Toews, taking their cue from proponents of Harold S. Bender's Anabaptist Vision, applied its lessons to Mennonite Brethren and rallied around a version of that vision known as the "Company of the Committed." Toews dedicated his 1975 book on the history of the Mennonite Brethren "To the 'Company of the Committed' in our brotherhood, who with faith and courage under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, endeavor to translate the Anabaptist vision of Christian discipleship and community into the work, witness, and life-style of the church in the contemporary world." This desire to recapture a purified, early Anabaptism saw "outside" influences as corrosive, as well as unnecessary.

But Mennonite Brethren must, nevertheless, acknowledge the eclecticism that shaped their early theological development. The community that withdrew from the Mennonite establishment in Russia borrowed both from the Lutheran Pietism of Eduard Wuest and also the Calvinist Baptist theology of German leaders, such as Johann Gerhard Oncken. The first Mennonite Brethren confession of faith cited Reformed Baptist Charles Spurgeon, as well as Anabaptist Menno Simons. Borrowing from evangelical Protestantism is not new in our denomination. In a 1972 article in the MB Herald, John A. Toews lamented that "we have brethren in our midst who have an

"inner urge to align ourselves with other groups . . ."

They usually look with suspicion upon cooperation in MCC or fellowship in MWC, but have no scruples to identify themselves with pedobaptists and militarists in EFC or NAE. This polarization of views does not only produce tensions within our brotherhood—it destroys our ability to unite for a powerful thrust in a common purpose, as evangelical Anabaptists and may eventually lead to a complete disruption in our brotherhood.

This statement could almost be repeated verbatim today. It shows that the practice of aligning with groups and traditions from the mainstream of evangelical Protestant Christianity is nothing new. As MBs, collaboration is in our DNA, with all of the benefits and costs that go with it.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The polarities defining New Calvinist and Anabaptist theologies need not create division or impede Mennonite Brethren efforts at faithful mission. Although there are areas of disagreement, many of these are less substantive and more the product of

diverse approaches to theological articulation. Encouraging warm-hearted theological conversations, in which the benefit of the doubt is extended to others on the basis of true Christian charity, would help to overcome the majority of these problems. Mennonite Brethren have historically valued broad participation in the community hermeneutic that has shaped the denomination, and ought to recall that the dialogue has not always been congenial. So, troubling conversations in the present should not surprise or dismay. Rather, divergent theologies within the Mennonite Brethren fellowship can help provide correctives to potential blind spots and facilitate good theological contextualization in a rapidly changing landscape.

Mennonite Brethren are enriched by robust conversations, including those with whom we disagree, and should embrace them. Mennonite Brethren leaders need to respond to misapprehensions about the ways in which Mennonite Brethren theology intersects paradigmatically with other theological systems. Mennonite Brethren would greatly benefit from a reappraisal of the value of systematic theology, and also acknowledge the systematic function of the biblical-theological approach Mennonite Brethren advocate in order to provide a better apologia for Mennonite Brethren theology in the wider Christian arena. Our engagement of the issues must not only clarify what we believe, but also challenge assumptions brought to the conversation by ill-informed theological interlocutors. The tension between New Calvinist and Anabaptist theology is not simply evidence of the larger debate between Puritan and Pietist evangelicalisms, though there are similarities.

The conversation must move to a deeper level before it will be able to move forward.

As well, Mennonite Brethren biblicism has been assumed rather than clarified. As a result, the Bible has become contested ground between Mennonite Brethren and New Calvinist individuals—among others. Mennonite Brethren approaches to Scripture need to be explored and defined if they are to provide clarity, rather than simply fuel further debate. I look forward to the future with confidence that the larger unity among Mennonite Brethren will be preserved, and that even where the shape of our evangelical Anabaptist identity changes over time, by God's grace it will change for the better. †

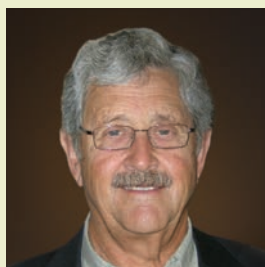
¹This article is excerpted from a larger article, Brian Cooper, "Reformed Theology Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren," *Direction* 42 No. 2 (Fall 2013): 132-147. *Direction* is a semiannual publication of the North American Mennonite Brethren schools and conferences. Past issues since 1979 are available online at directionjournal.org.



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