

No. - 1  
Box - 8  
Folder - F

CENTER FOR M. D. STUDIES IN CANADA  
77 HENDERSON HIGHWAY  
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA R2L 1L1

Response to Abe Dueck, "Church and State:

Developments among Mennonite Brethren since World War II "

Abe Dueck has presented us with a careful assessment of the discussion of the church-state question among M.B's in recent times. History is always potentially illuminating, and on the question of involvement with politics illumination is much needed.

One thing is clear: until recently there has been very little dispassionate discussion. A few spokesmen have attempted to provide some kind of guidance, usually in a situation where an election was in the offing. It does not appear that the question has ever been dealt with in depth in M.B. circles. Perhaps this is related to the fact that for the evangelical such matters may appear to be secondary in importance. But surely our posture in this question is like others, which together make up the being, which, much more than words, is our witness.

The most dramatic finding in Dr. Dueck's paper is surely the departure from the traditional, apolitical position, maintained up until and through the paternalistic 'reigns' of Prime-Ministers King and St. Laurant (were they perceived as benevolent Canadian Tsars?) until around 1957/58 when the slide into a grey post-traditional phase begins. Interestingly, it is after this point that the traditional position is first articulated, modifications being very grudgingly admitted to the theory while the practise moves swiftly to a new position. Clearly, the writings and actions of the recent past call for a serious re-appraisal of our view of the state, in view of what it has become.

One question that arises from both the theory and practice of the recent past is: What kind of political or ideological posture flows from an evangelical Anabaptist-Mennonite faith? Can it really be many kinds?

A recent statement by a Mennonite politician quoted in the Mennonite Mirror (Nov., 1980) sounds both very typical and indicative of the present confused state. He was asked:

With your Anabaptist background, how do you reconcile your involvement with Conservative politics?

The answer:

When will we recognize that a great many of the finer things that the radicals have fought for over the years in this country have been achieved in terms of freedoms, and the rights that we enjoy, and the social conscience we endorse? I believe in the preservation of the sort of climate that allows the individual to develop and congregations to maintain themselves. I see in the left, the Socialist side, if you like (the side earlier credited for the finer things, like a social conscience) a far greater danger threatening the values that we with our Anabaptist roots consider important. I consider my support of a conservative philosophy as being extremely important to the survival of our particular Mennonite values ....

It appears to me that we have to take a hard look, not only at the logic, but at the "unexamined premises", the assumptions presented in terms like "Anabaptist background" and "Mennonite values" on the one hand and at "radicals" and "Socialists" as well as "conservative philosophy" on the other. This examination, I would submit, will only be fruitful if indeed there is such a thing as a Mennonite Brethren theology, which is capable of serving as a point of reference, a fixed point in a madly turning world.

Victor G. Doerksen  
The University of Manitoba