



## "RESPONSE TO A COVENANTING PEOPLE"

By John Vooyo

The tenor of Janzen's paper is that the Mennonite Brethren Church ought to be a covenanting people, a people committed to each other. The author is to be commended for this timely reminder.

Although covenanting in this fashion is crucial, it is not, however, a modern equivalent to the Abrahamic, Sinaitic or Davidic covenant. These biblical covenants have God and his people in loyal, though not equal partnership. Likewise, God's promised "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31-44) has the same arrangement.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the most important part of the forming of this new covenant (cf. Luke 22:20, Hebrews 8:3-13) and, thus, Christ and his church are in a covenant relationship. This is a reality which, then, is the basis for Christians and church bodies to covenant with each other. If one needs a biblical parallel, perhaps "parity covenants" could be cited. Such dipleuric (two-sided) covenants have parties of generally equal standing, eg. Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:44ff.) and David and Jonathan (I Samuel 18:3f.; 23:18).

It is worth considering that the greater the commitment believers have to the Christ-Christian covenant the greater, likely, will be their commitment to fellow believers. A true covenant with Christ will make covenanting between Christians in local churches and between churches in a Conference easier and genuine.

Janzen states, ". . . faith in Christ must be linked with following Christ. . . . How one behaves will be determined by what one believes." Discipleship, something on which Mennonite Brethren place a lot of emphasis, is often, in this generation, understood as a mere believing in the right doctrines and holding the right ethics, not necessarily obedience to all that Christ commanded and modeled. Ethical behavior and lifestyle often don't display what church members claim they believe, thus leading observers to the notion that what shows up in practice reflects more correctly what a person actually believes. As someone has said, "We practice daily what we believe--all the rest is religious talk."

This being so, to suggest a name change to "The Mennonite Brethren Church of North America" would not solve some of the deep lack of commitment problems we see, nor reflect our belief in being a believers' church and a covenanting community. Rather, our conference should put greater emphasis on gaining and making, not mere converts to Christianity, but disciples, those who will not only believe correctly but also do correctly. We were/are instructed by Christ that as we are going into all the world, we are to "make disciples . . . and teach me to obey everything" he had commanded his twelve disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

May God help us, as Mennonite Brethren, to remain true to this calling and reflect our covenant with him by being disciples who also covenant with each other.