

# Preface

THIS VOLUME CONTAINS THE papers of the 17th Believers' Church Conference, held at Acadia University on June 22–25, 2016. The major sponsor was Acadia Divinity College, the Theological Faculty of Acadia University.

The late esteemed historian, Donald Durnbaugh, himself a founder of the conferences, helpfully defined the Believers' Churches. Durnbaugh considered nine factors: voluntary church membership, separation of church and state, performance of Christian works, high ethical standards, discipleship under discipline, benevolent giving to the poor, mutual aid, believers baptism, everything centered on the word, prayer, and love.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of the Acadia conference, as the title suggests, was Separationism, a noticeable tendency among the Believers' Churches since the sixteenth century. By separationism is meant a disposition or tendency to divide, separate or form a schismatic movement. As sociologists and historians have shown, this can be due to doctrinal, political, personal leadership, or ethnic reasons. The positive side of separationism is that it provides a renewing effect in a tradition and adds to the variety. The negative aspect is that fellowship is severed, mission impaired, and theologically the unity of the Body of Christ is broken. There are biblical foundations and theological rationales for separation, usually suggesting an unhealthy or unacceptable position in the main body, that will be improved upon, or "purified" in the successor groups.

The planners of the Conference sought to investigate the wideness of the phenomenon, which we perceived now extends far beyond the historic Believers' Churches even to New Religious Movements. Thus we include here early manifestations among European dissenters, the Baptists, Anabaptists, Mennonites, and the Restoration Movement. Special studies provide

1. Durnbaugh, *Believers' Church*, 32–33.

insights into the role women played, the nature of the Black Experience in the United States, and the modern Pentecostal Tradition. A major essay examines the New Religious movements who in many cases have “come out of” existing religious groups. As one essay indicates, the Believers’ Churches are now a sustaining part of the experience and data of the Christian historical tradition. So far as we know, this is the first examination of the phenomenon among the Believers’ Churches and it should become an authority in this generation.

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