Foreword

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The Mennonite World Conference has instituted Renewal 2027 in its celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition. Together with other historical and current grounds for emphasizing the 1527–2027 anniversary, this confirms the view of John Howard Yoder, the great Mennonite spokesman of the past generation, that the Seven Articles of Schleitheim (1527) were "the crystallization point" of Anabaptism. Article Four, the keystone of the Seven Articles, declared "A separation shall take place from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil has planted in the world. . . . We have no fellowship with them, and do not run with them in the confusion of their abominations. . . . Now there is nothing else in the world and all creation than good or evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who have come out of the world, God's temple and idols, Christ and Belial; and none will have part with the other. . . . By this are meant all popish and re-popish works and idolatry, gatherings, church attendance, wine houses, guarantees and commitments of unbelief and other things of the kind. . . . Thereby shall also fall away from us the diabolical weapons of violence—such as sword, armor, and the like, and all their use to protect friends or against enemies."

The separation was to take place between true Christian baptized believers and "popish and re-popish works and idolatry." Certainly there was to be no separation from the Christian church, which was one, and divinely protected from division. Yet as John Roth acknowledges in his contribution, the historical consequence of the Protestant Reformation was a great proliferation of Christian organizations claiming to participate in the Christian church—or, in some cases, to be the exclusive embodiment of the Christian

church. It has been part of Roman Catholic polemic against the Reformation that it created hundreds of churches where there had previously been one church founded by Peter. That, however, limits the focus on Christianity to Western Europe and its overseas expansions. In fact, since Paul of Tarsus created Gentile Christianity, with or without the approval to the Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem run by Jacob, brother of Jesus, the Christian church has had diverse expressions. The early Christianity of Egypt and Ethiopia was distinct from the Christianity organized by the Council of Nicaea (325) and that Christianity underwent a schism between its Eastern and Western components in 1054. So the Reformation was by no means the historical beginning of Christian divisions. In fact, it was not even the beginning of the separations in Latin Christendom, as Martin Rothkegel points out in the first essay of the collection. For a hundred years previously the Hussite movement in Bohemia and Moravia had generated divisions anticipating the German Reformation. Indeed, the beginning of separated Anabaptist brotherhoods in Mikulov, Moravia, in early 1528 was certainly an imitation of Hussite practice. John Roth suggests that the separation and unity of the church can be conceived as analogous to a biological rhizome: "Rhizomes are plants that propagate by sending out a profusion of roots laterally, parallel to the soil above. At various points, the interconnected roots of a rhizome develop nodes that send sprouts up above the ground in unpredictable places. From the surface it appears as if these sprouts are quite distinct entities. But underneath the soil, they are all joined together in a complex and interconnected web of horizontal relationships." Such an outlook would make separation compatible with the broadest and most ambitious ecumenism.

In fact, the Believers' Church Conferences in the past tended not to be broadly ecumenical. They were meeting places of Mennonites and Baptists (and related groups like the Church of the Brethren) who emphasized the baptism of believing persons who understood the meaning of the religious choice they were making. The distinction between "church" and "sect" was pioneered by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch—"churches" dispensed religious blessings to their members without making assumptions about the condition of their souls; the "sects" were according to Weber "communities of personal believers of the reborn and only those." This transformation of a formally pejorative term ("sect") at the beginning of the twentieth century did not deny that the churches and sects were each Christian in their different ways. In fact, it was intended to extract polemics from Protestant discourse. Troeltsch and Weber were responded to in 1923 by Karl Holl's "Luther und die Schwärmer," which undertook to reaffirm Luther's polemics against his Protestant opponents. A tradition of Protestant church

historians in Germany and America extending into the 1960s and 1970s thereafter connected medieval mysticism with "bad religion," which was odd, because Luther's religious beliefs were also enriched by the medieval German mystical tradition.

The papers by William Brackney, Colin Godwin, John Roth, and Teun van der Leer fit the previous focus of the Believers' Church Conferences upon Baptists and Mennonites, applying the theme of separation. Brackney traces Baptist separations from sixteenth-century England through North America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At first the division between Baptists who believed in freedom of the will and those who believed in predestination mirrored the differences between the Arminians and the orthodox Calvinists among the Dutch Reformed. In North America the presence or absence of slavery made a great difference between the tightly organized Southern Baptists, who became fundamentalists, and the congregational Baptists of the North, who were more typical mainstream Protestants. However, major Baptist personalities in the North tended to be disruptive presences, constantly on the lookout for doctrinal deviations. Colin Godwin writes about sixteenth-century Anabaptists, focusing on believers' baptism and eschatology. Truly, both were universal among early Anabaptists; but eschatological expectations were well-nigh universal in the age of the Reformation. John Roth highlights the spectacular expansion of the Mennonite/Anabaptist movement in the Southern Hemisphere; whereas there were 600,000 members in 1978, now there are more than two million. But the Mennonite Church USA, newly created from the union of the Old Mennonites and the General Conference Mennonites (2002), is already experiencing schisms as some congregations conduct same-sex marriages and others denounce them. General cultural changes do not let the Mennonites untouched—the Amish, while making adaptations of their own, continue less affected by the surrounding culture. Teun van der Leer's brief concluding paper is a retrospect on the Believers' Church Conferences. The *corpus christianum* of the pre-World War II European state churches is now gone. The individual congregation is the Body of Christ. It is obvious that believers' baptism was the norm in the New Testament. But amid the current wave of European secularism, are these concerns of a generation ago still relevant?

The papers by Douglas Foster and Russell Prime examine the collision between Baptists and Disciples of Christ, begun by Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell in the early nineteenth century. The Disciples practiced baptism by immersion, but it was not central to their message. They illustrate a different perspective on Christian primitivism, sometimes claimed to be the essence of Baptism and Anabaptism. They wanted to

escape the world of competing denominations, and, guided by an Enlightenment outlook, to live as the New Testament apostles lived, rather than to quarrel over finer points of doctrine. Prime examines the failure of an attempted "organic union" between Baptists and Disciples in the Maritimes, 1903–1908. Both groups were immersionists, brought together by the Sunday School and Christian Endeavor Movements; but different views about congregational independence, and possibly fundamentalist vs. liberal riptides, prevented a merger.

The ecstatic, experiential, revivalist character of America's First and Second Great Awakenings tended to undermine churches that had become too dry and conventional. Allison MacGregor presents such an analysis of the rise of Pentecostalism in Newfoundland ca. 1925. The Methodists, of course, practiced infant baptism; but in an earlier generation they had stressed revivals with emotional conversions and sanctifying "second blessings." Now the immersionist Pentecostal leaders moved in, and Newfoundland Methodism "disappeared" with the merger that created the United Church of Canada in 1925. She acknowledges that similar lines connected Methodism with the rise of the Salvation Army in Newfoundland.

Most of the dissenting movements in the Reformation had a majority of women members. At the same time the women were enjoined by Paul to be silent during worship. Karen Smith argues, however, that, like Anabaptists, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British Baptists had prophetesses among their female members, and that they made personal testimonies of faith before their baptisms as well as very noticeable death-bed testimonies.

David Goatley writes about black Baptist denominations. The need to create them, particularly in the Southern United States, was a product of the ingrained racism of slavery followed by segregation. They were not stable organizations, partly because of their inevitable political and social agendas. Virtually all black Baptist denominations outside the slave states in the United States and in Canada were abolitionist before the Civil War. After Reconstruction, and into the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, they divided into groups aimed at black power, and groups committed to accommodation between blacks and whites. Not unlike white Northern Baptist "prima donnas," charismatic black preachers were almost inevitably destructive forces in the organization of black Baptist denominations.

The longest and least typical chapter in the book is the contribution by Eileen Barker, described in the list of contributors at the end of the volume as "a sociologist of religion and an emeritus professor of the London School of Economics—widely regarded as the leading authority on New Religious Movements (NRM)," past President of the Association for the Sociology of Religion (2001–2002). The New Religious Movements she describes are

decidedly not persons God has called out of the world to be members of Christ's church. They were in the past described as "sects" and "cults," but she prefers to class them as New Religious Movements, in order to make an empirical assessment about their character. From her standpoint these are by no means all objects of ecumenism, about which we can draw the "rhizomic" analysis suggested by John Roth. They include the People's Temple, famous for its collective murder/suicide in 1978 at Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, the Children of God, and the Church of Scientology, together with more conventional groups such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. She argues that the "brainwashing" and "programming" of which such groups are accused are, in fact, not distinguishable from the "conversions" of the nineteenth-century Great Awakening. She makes a good case that countries that legislate against them are in violation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Most readers would not want to place many of the groups Eileen Barker describes within the boundaries of the believers' churches. Put this way, some persons do separate from the world in order to do wicked things to other people who have not come along with them. Barker observes, probably correctly, that the fear of cults fits into American history between the Red Scare of the McCarthy era and current Islamophobia.

The Believers' Church Conferences have produced a heterogeneous collection of proceedings. They invite religious advocacy and/or critical scholarship from their contributors. This volume, particularly, reminds us that it is not always straightforward to distinguish the one from the other.