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LAW AND GOSPEL IN THE BRETHREN TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION

THE movement known as the Brethren Church began in 1708 in Germany under the leadership of Alexander Mack (1679-1735), who had been a member of the Reformed Church. Having been influenced strongly by spokesmen for Radical German Pietism and by representatives of the Anabaptist movement, Mack and seven others were baptized by trine immersion in August 1708 and began a new church initially referring to themselves as "Brethren."¹ Persecution was soon in coming in an era which did not encourage religious tolerance and the growing church relocated, eventually immigrating to America in two groups, one in 1719 and the second, including Mack, in 1729.

Emphasizing the Bible as its soul authority and eschewing creedal subscription, the Brethren found themselves on occasion subject to differing interpretations from their church leaders. The focus of this study is upon the concepts of law and gospel as articulated by some prominent persons in the history of the movement. First the views of

¹The Brethren movement has been identified by many names. The early Brethren by design had no distinctive name for their fellowship of believers. They simply referred to themselves as *Brüder* ("brethren") or sometimes as *Taufgesinnten* ("Baptist-minded"). Others quickly began to call them *Täufer* ("[Ana]Baptists") or *Neue Täufer* ("New [Ana]Baptists") to distinguish them from the Mennonites and Swiss Brethren that they so closely resembled. They were also called *Schwarzenau Täufer* after the place where the movement originated. Various nicknames that referred to their dramatic form of immersion baptism were *Dompelaar* and *Tunker* or *Tunck-Täufer* (from the German word *tunken*, meaning "to dunk," or "immerse").

In America, Brethren were sometimes called *Sunday Baptists* or *First-Day Baptists* to distinguish them from the sabbatarian Ephrata community whose members were known as *Seventh Day Baptists* (also *Seventh-Dayers*). Nicknames for the Brethren included *Tumblers*, *Tumplers*, and *Tunkers*. English-speaking outsiders tended to use *Dunkers* or *Dunkards*. Brethren have ordinarily disliked the term *Dunkard*. (Donald F. Durnbaugh and Dennis D. Martin, "Names, Brethren" in *The Brethren Encyclopedia* [Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983] 2:910-11.)

For the purposes of this study, the term "Brethren" will be used to identify the movement.

Mack will be considered. Attention will then turn to the teachings of Peter Nead (1796–1877), who “was the chief spokesman for the style of life, the simplicity of doctrine, and the general world view of the German Baptist Brethren which prevailed from the Revolutionary War until about 1850.”²

Following a three-fold division of the church in 1882–83, the body known as The Brethren Church was formed, composed of those who expressed the progressive stance that was one of the reasons for the schism. One leader of this church was Charles F. Yoder (1873–1955), who will be considered after Nead. Finally, attention will be turned to some participants in the dissension within The Brethren Church which led to further division in 1939. That break resulted in two groups claiming the same tradition, one retaining the title The Brethren Church, the other taking the name of the National Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. Many factors led to this split, one being the issue that is the concern of this study. Charges of legalism and anti-nomianism were part of the sometimes bitter exchange between the two Brethren factions.

THE TEACHING OF ALEXANDER MACK

Background

Alexander Mack,³ the founder and first minister of the Brethren, received no formal theological education. As a miller in Schriesheim Mack was influenced strongly by the Radical Pietist and Separatist, Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau, with whom he traveled and preached in 1706. Bible study and prayer meetings were begun in Mack’s home and as a result of success in evangelistic meetings with Hochmann, the officials of the Reformed Church in Heidelberg sought and received government assistance in opposing the unauthorized gatherings. Mack and his wife fled Schriesheim, settling in the Wittgenstein town of Schwarzenau. Continuing to travel with Hochmann, Mack came into contact with Anabaptists who impressed him with their expression of faith and their doctrine of the church.

This twofold influence of Radical Pietism and Anabaptists served as a foundation for the development of Mack’s thought. Concerned about a faith that was more than mere confession but that also resulted in an obedient life, Mack became convinced of the importance of baptism by immersion for those who had come to faith in Christ. The great

²Fred W. Benedict, “Nead, Peter” in *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2:918.

³A brief survey of the life of Alexander Mack by William G. Willoughby can be found in *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2:775–777. Willoughby also has written a biography on Mack, *Counting the Cost* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1979).

emphasis placed on baptism by Mack and those who met with him brought tension to the relationship with Hochmann but Mack was convinced of the need to follow the scriptures rather than man, even a godly man such as Hochmann.

The Necessity of Obedience to Commandments

The emphasis on obedience to the commands of God has been a part of the Brethren tradition from its beginning. Though Mack clearly stated that good news of salvation was received through faith, his concept of faith encompassed more than acceptance of the Savior. "It has been testified sufficiently above that we do not seek to earn salvation with these simple works, but by faith in Christ alone. If it is to be saving faith, it must produce works of obedience."⁴ The question to be answered was obedience to which commands.

Mack, though allowing for continuity between the Old and New Testaments, drew a clear distinction between the commands of the Old and those of the New.

We are of the opinion and believe as the apostle writes (Heb. 7:12): "For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well." As long as the Levitical priesthood existed, just that long no one dared to annul the law, or circumcision, without incurring God's grave punishment and displeasure. However, when Christ came He introduced a law of life as the eternal High Priest and Son of God. He annulled the first law because it was too weak and could not make anyone perfect. He secured eternal redemption, revealed the paths to the Holy of Holies, and gave only laws of life. . . .

Therefore, we believe that the teaching of Jesus the crucified must be kept until He himself shall come again and take vengeance with the flaming fire upon those who are not obedient to His gospel, according to Paul's witness (2 Thessalonians 1:8). For this reason, then, the teachings of Jesus are rightly to be observed by believers in these days. However, there are no commandments for unbelievers.⁵

Mack assumed that obedience to the instructions of Jesus is not to be considered an option but a necessity.

Thus, it may be readily believed that God most certainly wants everything to be kept which He has made known and revealed to the whole world in these latter times through His beloved Son. That is, all who call themselves Christians should live as children of one household. The

⁴Alexander Mack, "Answers to Gruber's Basic Questions," trans. by Donald F. Durnbaugh, in *European Origins of the Brethren*, ed. by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1958) 335.

⁵Ibid., 328.

good Householder [*Haus-Vater*] has given them rules and laws which they are to keep and respect well and prudently. Along with it, He has promised them life eternal, if they will obey Him in all things—insignificant as well as the important ones. However, none of the teachings and ordinances of our Lord Jesus may be considered insignificant, for they were indeed commanded and ordained by an all-powerful Monarch and King.⁶

He wrote further: “Where there is Scriptural faith, it will also produce the true love according to the Scriptures. ‘This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments’ (1 John 5:3).”⁷

The obedience called for is not an extra effort on the part of the child of God but is the result of the quality of saving faith. Mack argued: “Faith in Christ produces obedience and submission to all of His words and commandments.”⁸ Especially significant was the obedience in submitting to believer’s baptism. Though salvation is not received by baptism, a person who professed faith but refused submission to believer’s baptism was considered an unbeliever.

We do indeed believe and profess that eternal life is not promised because of baptism, but only through faith in Christ (John 3:15, 18). Why should a believer not wish to do the will of Him in whom he believes? If it is the will of Christ that a believer should be baptized, then it is also the will of the believer. If he thus wills and believes as Christ wills, he is saved, even if it were impossible for him to receive baptism. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, but it did not happen; the son was not sacrificed. Yet obedience was fulfilled, and the blessing was received. Therefore, a believer who desires to be baptized, but cannot obtain it because of necessity—like the criminal on the cross—is still saved.

If, however, a man does not desire to be baptized, he is rightly to be judged as unbelieving and disobedient, not because of the baptism, but because of his unbelief and disobedience.⁹

Note, Mack did not affirm that baptism saves but that the faith which saves drives the faithful to obedience beyond repentance and belief. In reacting against his Reformed background, he rejected the idea “that faith was an intellectual acceptance of propositional truth.”¹⁰ His view of faith and salvation focused not upon the punctiliar moment of initiation, to which some added credal subscription, but upon the progressive

⁶Alexander Mack, “Rights and Ordinances,” trans. by Donald F. Dumbaugh, in *European Origins of the Brethren*, 345–47.

⁷*Ibid.*, 382.

⁸Mack, “Basic Questions,” 331.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Willoughby, *Counting the Cost*, 65.

expression of obedience. Willoughby concluded that Mack interpreted faith as being like "a growing plant rather than a finished structure."¹¹ He added: "To these early Baptists, faith which was not experienced as an inner commitment to Christ and expressed in practical acts in everyday life was an invalid faith. Only through faith-obedience, expressed voluntarily through acts of love, is one ever made whole."¹² In their desire to obey Christ and follow His example, Mack and his church went to some extremes, subsequently disavowed,¹³ including the practice of sexual continence for the married. The practice of the ban also has been judged extreme in some instances.¹⁴

In conclusion, it is clear that for Mack the Mosaic Law had been done away with the coming of the superior law of Christ. Though he emphasized the necessity of obedience to the commands of Christ, it is best to say that Mack was not a legalist in the sense of imposing laws upon individuals by which they might be saved or sanctified and to recognize that he had a view of faith that was not held commonly by those around him. By faith comes union with Christ and the faithful will do what Christ would have them to do.

THE TEACHING OF PETER NEAD

Background

Raised in a Lutheran home, Nead turned away from the offer of training for ministry in the Lutheran church. For a time a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he was influenced to join the Brethren through a booklet published by Benjamin Bowman who served the church in Rockingham County, Virginia.¹⁵ An author of theological treatises and articles for the denominational paper, Nead's "writings introduced many people to the Brethren and his work became recognized as a standard for the Brethren."¹⁶

Mosaic Law

Like Mack, Nead viewed Mosaic law as bound to the Old Testament era and superseded by the work and commands of Christ. He divided the law into two categories, moral and ceremonial, and declared that both were necessary as forerunners to the coming of

¹¹Ibid., 66.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Mack, "Basic Questions," 341.

¹⁴Albert T. Ronk, *History of the Brethren Church* (Ashland, OH: Brethren Publishing Co., 1968) 51-53.

¹⁵Benedict, "Nead, Peter," 2:918.

¹⁶Ibid., 2:919

Jesus.¹⁷ The moral law had the twofold purpose of revealing the righteousness and holiness of God and the condemnation of humankind in failing to measure up to that righteousness. The moral law condemned the sinner.¹⁸ As the moral law brought the knowledge of sin, the ceremonial law “revealed the expiation for sin.”¹⁹ The Old Testament offerings and sacrifices did not bring expiation in themselves but were shadows of what was to come.²⁰

New Testament Law

Though teaching that the Mosaic law belonged to a previous dispensation, escape from obedience to law was not part of Nead’s presentation. The New Testament is also law. Referring to the church, he wrote: “. . . Her profession: she acknowledges but one head; the Lord Jesus Christ: she acknowledges but one law book; the [New] Testament. She believes that all members are obliged to observe all the laws and ordinances of the one law book.”²¹ The legalism inherent in this statement is observed by Dale R. Stoffer:

The Christian’s responsibility with regard to the precepts delivered by Christ is unqualified obedience. The Brethren tendency of viewing the new life in Christ in legalistic terms is especially strong in Nead. Not one commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be taken lightly or overlooked.²²

The Way of Salvation

There are four steps involved in securing salvation. The first step is the enlightenment of the person to the truth of the gospel message. The next three steps are the responsibility of the individual who is to act upon the enlightenment provided through God’s revelation. These steps, according to Nead, are “repentance towards God and Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to enter into covenant with God, by being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”²³

Repentance is defined as “a change of mind including that reformation of life effected by the power of the Gospel.”²⁴ Nead wrote of

¹⁷Peter Nead, *Theological Writings on Various Subjects* (reprint of 1866 edition, Poland, OH: Dunker Reprints, 1985) 21.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, 356.

²²Dale R. Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines 1650–1987* (Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1989) 116.

²³Nead, *Theological Writings*, 41.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 44.

faith: "Faith is simply the reception of testimony, and when by the Gospel we are solicited, yea commanded to believe in Jesus Christ, we are to understand so as to credit the testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ, to put our trust in [sic] him as the Saviour and Redeemer of our souls and bodies—and the evidence of Faith is obedience to the Gospel."²⁵ This faith is commanded by God, who cannot require the impossible of people, and is, therefore, a voluntary exercise of the individual. "Faith then, as well as any other command of the Gospel, is at the control of man, that is it can be obeyed or disobeyed. . . ." ²⁶

Repentance and faith constitute the individual a subject fit for baptism.²⁷ Acknowledging that there are those who are aware of the command of baptism but who do not believe it "essential to salvation," Nead proclaimed: ". . . and as it respects my faith, I do believe, that baptism is not only a command, but also essential to salvation."²⁸ Baptism is a necessary part of the salvation process for God purposes to enter into covenant with the believer "and it is in Baptism that this covenant is ratified."²⁹ Those who have entered into covenant with God through baptism are the ones able to observe the precepts commanded by Christ and are those with whom He abides (Matt 28:19–20).³⁰ In opposing the proclamation of salvation by faith alone, Nead referred for support to Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:37–38.³¹

Some of the stress in Nead's words may be the result of the revivalism sweeping the eastern United States in the first half of the 1800s. Nead saw little or no value in these services for though they seemed to generate religious frenzy they did not produce workers for the kingdom of God. He wrote:

For instance—It is certain that all those new converting means, which are held in such high estimation by many, can never accomplish a genuine change in man. I will not dispute but that those strange manoeuvres are calculated to creat [sic] great anxiety, and produce a partial change: but I contend, that inasmuch as they have not been appointed by Jesus Christ, or the apostles, that they have never been blessed, so as to produce a genuine change in man—though we frequently hear the advocates for these modern means say, that they know that God has and does bless these mans. I should like to know in what way? Do they mean, that by the use of those means, so many have joined their society? If this be the blessing they allude to, I am inclined to believe that it is a great

²⁵Ibid., 44.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 45.

²⁸Ibid., 46.

²⁹Ibid., 52.

³⁰Ibid., 103.

³¹Ibid., 313.

curse instead of a blessing. The reader may take it for granted that the doctrines and commandments of men are always in the room of the Gospel, and when received are sure to produce a false impression, and if such deluded souls are not apprized of it in this life, they will be when their case cannot be remedied. I have no doubt, but that thousands believe such revivals occasioned by the outpourings of the Spirit of God and will view me as a great enemy to the spread of christianity. But I cannot well help it; I believe that it is my duty to protest against such corrupt proceedings. I say corrupt, because they are in lieu of the Word of God, and calculated to blind not only the present, but the rising generation. The preachers [sic] sole aim is, the feelings of his audience. If he can only succeed at alarming them, he is sure to gain his point: whereas it is the duty of all preachers to illuminate the understanding in man, by preaching the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ; and if a sense of the Gospel does not cause them to yield obedience to Christ, then their salvation cannot be effected; for the word and Spirit of God is the seed of the new birth, and not the invention of man.³²

Nead's concern for the church of Jesus Christ to be obedient to His commands resulted in prescribed practices. In addition to baptism, Nead emphasized the threefold communion service—feetwashing, the love feast and the Lord's Supper; the holy kiss; non-swearing of oaths; anointing of the sick with oil in Jesus' name; non-conformity to the world in dress and personal appearance; hospitality and almsgiving. However, this approach to salvation has brought criticism in light of what is considered a serious deficiency. Stoffer concluded that "his legalistic and literalistic approach to the Word tends to emphasize the ordinances, at the expense of the inner spirit and faith which vivify the obedience of faith."³³

Nead served as a leading spokesman for the traditionalist camp of Brethren who were concerned about a number of progressive steps being allowed within the fellowship, an issue which would lead to division in 1882–83.

THE TEACHING OF CHARLES FRANCIS YODER

Background

Concerns about the progressive ideas "including a salaried ministry, personal choice in dress, a new approach to missions, and interest in secondary and higher education and a commitment to Sunday schools and protracted (evangelistic) meetings"³⁴ emphasized by some within

³²Ibid., 59–60.

³³Stoffer, *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines*, 117.

³⁴Robert G. Clouse, "Holsinger, Henry Ritz," in *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 1:621.

the Brethren were partly responsible for a threefold division of the church in 1882–83. The progressive body became known as The Brethren Church, in which C. F. Yoder played an active role. His book, *God's Means of Grace*, presents the typical Brethren emphases concerning the Mosaic law and obedience but with a new approach.

Yoder attended Taylor University and Manchester College before graduating from the University of Chicago with BA (1899) and BD (1902) degrees.³⁵ He served his church as a pastor, educator and missionary.

Mosaic Law

Like Mack and Nead before him, Yoder interpreted the Mosaic code as the forerunner of the gospel in the unfolding of the program of God. He explained: "There is the bud, then the blossom and then the fruit of ripened seed, which produces another plant with buds and flowers and fruit. So each dispensation has borne its fruit and passed away to give place to a new cycle, with better things."³⁶ The Mosaic law was preparation for the gospel, the "shadow of good things to come," and fulfilled and done away with in Christ.³⁷

In 1931, Yoder wrote articles for *The Brethren Evangelist* in which he discussed the Mosaic law and its relationship to the gospel. These articles were written in the question and answer form, focusing upon matters relating to the ten commandments. He began by denying that the ten commandments were the eternal moral law of God, distinct from the ceremonial and dispensational aspects of the law. He declared: "The ten commandments are a summary of the entire law. Therefore if the summary is moral the whole is moral."³⁸ He explained that the ten commandments are "abolished in the letter and preserved in the spirit," a situation that is true of the other commands of the law as well.³⁹ Deuteronomy 25:4, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn" is an example of a commandment not of the ten which is applied in spirit in 1 Corinthians 9:9.⁴⁰ Responding to the question of the re-institution of the old covenant in the future age, Yoder wrote:

The truth is that the prophetic language takes the familiar terms of the law to picture the time when it shall be fulfilled in Spirit under the

³⁵Dennis D. Martin, "Yoder, Charles Francis," in *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2:1385.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 38–39.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 39–41.

³⁸C. F. Yoder, "Studies in the Scriptures," *The Brethren Evangelist* 53:5 (31 January 1931) 8.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

new covenant made in the blood of Christ. Let us take an example: Psalm 132:12–18, “If thy children (of David) keep my covenant they shall sit on my throne forever, because Jehovah hath chosen Zion. He hath desired it as his habitation. This is my rest forever. Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will bless it. I will satisfy its poor with bread. I will also bless its priests with health and the saints shall shout for joy. There I will make the horn of David to be renewed. “[sic] In Jesus, the only son of David to kep [sic] the covenant, is fulfilled the prophecy (Acts 2:30, 31). Zion is the new Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26). The rest is the rest in the Holy Spirit (Isa. 28:11; Acts 2:1–4). The poor are the repentant sinners, satisfied with the bread of Christ (John 6:35–57). The priests are believers (1 Pet. 2:5) and the voices of jubilee are their sacrifices of praise (Heb. 13:13–16). The horn of David is the scepter of Christ (Acts 4:26–27). It is true that Israel will return to her land in unbelief, but when she looks upon him whom she has pierced she will repent and believe, the same as do the Gentiles (Rom. 10:12–13; 11:25–27).⁴¹

The New Covenant

The New Covenant, which supersedes the Old, is “but a further unfolding of God’s revelation of Himself” and, as with the Old, has ordinances which are “fundamental to the spiritual life.”⁴² The emphasis placed on the ordinances by progressive Brethren, such as Yoder, is different in approach than that of the Brethren tradition. Rather than focusing upon the matter of compliance with the New Covenant ordinances as commands of Christ to be obeyed, a view which Yoder did not deny, he stressed the benefits of obedience. He argued:

The symbols or ordinances are helps to character and means of teaching, and because they are truly “God’s means of grace” they have an intrinsic value which makes them worth contending for. The old apologetic made much of technical arguments and formal obedience. Such arguments now fail to appeal to thinking people so much as arguments based on utility. And, although the point has been much ignored in the past, here is the greatest reason for faithfulness to God’s institutions. They are given for man’s good, by Him who best of all knew man’s needs and how to supply them.⁴³

Yoder also affirmed: “The ordinances of the church have an inherent value which makes them worth while, even if they had not the divine command to back them up.”⁴⁴ He listed sixteen values with scripture support and commentary.⁴⁵

⁴¹Yoder, “Studies in the Scriptures,” *The Brethren Evangelist* 53:6 (7 February 1931) 8.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 43, 46.

⁴³Yoder, *God’s Means of Grace*, 13.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 30–36.

Though approaching the issue of ordinances differently, Yoder nevertheless was in agreement with his forebears in the Brethren tradition as he interpreted the gospel to encompass more than belief in Christ. His "Studies in Scripture" are divided into two parts. First are the gospel doctrines which include church membership qualifications, duties, doctrines, discipline, meetings and ordinances. Gospel ordinances, referring to baptism and the Lord's Supper, make up the second part.⁴⁶ This view of the meaning of *gospel* was challenged in the 1930s with the increasing influence of dispensationalism in The Brethren Church.

LAW, GOSPEL AND DIVISION

Background

Having existed for two centuries without a confessional statement and proclaiming that the Bible was the only final authority, the Brethren had encountered division previously. There were at least twenty-one instances of schism among the Brethren in less than two centuries of the movement's existence.⁴⁷ With the arrival of the 1930s, leaders in the denomination found themselves involved in heated debate as conflicting theological viewpoints surfaced within the church. Calvinism, dispensationalism and fundamentalism entered into the fellowship through the influence of church leaders such as Alva J. McClain and Louis S. Bauman.

McClain (1888–1968) was converted as a result of revival meetings held by Bauman in 1911 and transferred to the Bible Institute of Los Angeles from the University of Washington. He received his seminary education at Xenia Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian institution. McClain graduated from Occidental College after completing his seminary work. His formal education, therefore, took place in schools that were Calvinistic or fundamental and dispensational. His influence was exercised in The Brethren Church through his pastoral ministry in Philadelphia and particularly through his teaching ministry at Ashland College and, later, Ashland Theological Seminary. He was the most prominent theologian in The Brethren Church and contributed a column regularly to *The Brethren Evangelist*.

Bauman (1875–1950) served as pastor in Philadelphia and later planted and pastored the First Brethren Church of Long Beach, California, which, under his leadership, became the largest church in the denomination. Having been influenced strongly by a friend in his Philadelphia church, Bauman became deeply interested in the subject of prophecy. He became an advocate of dispensationalism and was one of

⁴⁶Yoder, "Studies in the Scriptures," *The Brethren Evangelist* 53:8 (21 February 1931) 8–9.

⁴⁷Robert B. Blair, "Schism," in *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, 2:1152.

the better-known prophecy conference speakers in fundamentalist circles. At one time he had questioned the doctrine known as eternal security but came to cling to that position. Though it would be inappropriate to identify Bauman as a Calvinist, his view of security posed a problem for the more traditional Brethren.

Calvinism was a problem to the Brethren who had historically emphasized the freedom of the individual to choose or not choose to turn to God in faith. The doctrine of election espoused by Calvinism ran contrary to Brethren tradition. The doctrine of eternal security was an offense to Brethren who were convinced that it afforded one assurance of salvation without any necessary expression of Christian obedience. Such Brethren could point to those who, having made a profession of faith, were told that their salvation was certain whether or not they lived in obedience to the ordinances of God. Such a view was contrary to all Brethren teaching.

Dispensationalism posed a problem not because of its interpretations of the prophetic scriptures but because of its view of law and grace. Where Brethren believed that obedience to the commands of God did not violate the principle of grace, dispensationalists proclaimed that the two concepts were incompatible. The latter view was of greatest offense to the traditional Brethren in the consideration of the Sermon on the Mount which contained commands of Christ to be obeyed by the church, according to the Brethren, but was relegated to a future interim period or to a Jewish kingdom by dispensationalists.

Fundamentalism was a movement which was interdenominational in its scope and, therefore, did not put a premium on the ordinances as practiced among the Brethren. The revivalistic emphasis of many fundamentalists also ran against the Brethren concept of a growing faith and obedience, a progressive salvation.

THE ISSUE OF LAW

McClain articulated his view of the law in a booklet, *Law and Grace*. He agreed with Yoder that the Mosaic law must be viewed as a whole; that it was incorrect to perpetuate one part of the law while ignoring the rest of its content.⁴⁸ That law was given to Israel as the Old Covenant relationship.⁴⁹ McClain contended that the word *law* in the New Testament referred to Mosaic law and for a Christian in any sense to be under law means subjection to Mosaic legislation.⁵⁰ Most disconcerting to the traditional Brethren was the view of the Sermon on the Mount espoused by McClain. He wrote: "The Sermon on the

⁴⁸Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace* (reprint of 1954 ed., Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973) 8.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 31-35.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 43.

Mount is an interpretation, in part, of the same Mosaic law, with special reference to its original inner meaning."⁵¹ The Sermon on the Mount contains the three aspects of the Mosaic arrangement: moral, civil and ceremonial legislation and also includes the penalties of that law.⁵² It is left for the reader to understand that the Christian, freed from responsibility to the Mosaic law, is free from obligation to the Sermon on the Mount. What has been considered an essential part of the gospel content by the Brethren was now declared Old Testament law and not gospel at all.

Bauman made this claim in bold words. "Now, there is *almost* as much gospel of salvation in the "Sermon on the Mount" as there is warmth in an iceberg! *The "Sermon on the Mount" contains no gospel of salvation at all!* The "Sermon on the Mount" is Simon-pure law!"⁵³ As one compares what Bauman said with the view of the earlier Brethren, there need not be the conclusion of contradiction. The traditional Brethren did view the Sermon on the Mount as law, New Covenant law, while Bauman identified it with Old Covenant law. At this point it is a dispensational Brethren view pitted against the traditional Brethren perspective. Bauman was adamant about salvation by faith alone with absolutely no works attached. However, he was just as assertive in declaring that he was convinced that there was not "a single preacher in our Brethren denomination that does not believe that when a man is saved,—'born again'—he gives THE EVIDENCE OF HIS SALVATION in a life that is obedient to the will of God as expressed in the commandments of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."⁵⁴ Bauman would seem to be incorrect and in disagreement with McClain for the latter did not interpret the Sermon on the Mount as commandments of Jesus directly applicable to the Christian.

Claud Studebaker (1883–1961), pastor in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and, later Goshen, Indiana, and Isaac Daniel Bowman (1862–1953) lecturer, pastor and evangelist, wrote in defense of the traditional Brethren position. Studebaker asserted his commitment to salvation by grace through faith alone at the same time that he affirmed that baptism was related to salvation. He wrote about the importance of baptism:

In my commission as a preacher of the Gospel of Christ, the Lord instructs me to teach and to baptize. May I say it makes no difference about baptism? When Christ says (Mark 16:16), "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," have I the liberty to say, baptism bears no

⁵¹Ibid., 12.

⁵²Ibid., 13–14.

⁵³Louis S. Bauman, "God's Plan for Our Age," *The Brethren Evangelist* 58:40 (17 October 1936) 10.

⁵⁴Louis S. Bauman, "The Grace That 'Bringeth Salvation,' the Salvation That Bringeth Forth 'Good Words,'" *The Brethren Evangelist* 60:35 (3 September 1938) 4.

relation to salvation? If Christ told Nicodemus (John 3:5), "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit," may I insist on the new birth and ignore the water? Christ was well aware of salvation wholly by grace without the works of the law, it is his gift of life, and Christ has ordained the law of spiritual life. Did the man who insisted on baptism immediately after his confession of Christ, probably that same hour of the night in a cold stream, believe any less in "Salvation by grace through faith," or did he have a higher regard for the plain commands of Christ?⁵⁵

He acknowledged that "baptism does not wash away the sins of the flesh, but it is the outward symbol of that which takes place in the heart of faith and the marvelous grace of God."⁵⁶ In defending the Brethren of previous generations, he concluded: "It may be our fathers over-emphasized the importance of baptism, but my feeling is, that they had just as thorough knowledge of salvation by grace without works as any group, but a greater emphasis on obedience to him who ordained life and salvation."⁵⁷

In his concern for the diminishing importance placed upon baptism within fundamental churches, Studebaker asserted:

Baptism in water is always associated with conversion, Scripturally and historically. Such significance is inherent in the nature of the ordinance. I would not say a man could not be saved without baptism, neither would I say it is not essential to salvation. I can say with all positiveness that Christ taught Nicodemus it was an essential part of the new birth. He commissioned me to preach and to baptize, saying "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" and I insist on baptism. If folks are saved without it, I have no regrets, but be it far from me so to teach it. I believe just as strongly as any that "We are justified by faith without the works of the law," but am just as firmly convinced that God has placed the holy ordinance of baptism at the door of the church as a monumental testimony of indisputable character that man must be cleansed, born anew, by faith in him who died and rose again, by the power of the triune God, and the church does well to give it due significance as a mighty argument for the doctrine of salvation. She removes the ordinance at great peril to those doctrines.⁵⁸

He continued to express his concern in another article published two years later. Commenting on Ephesians 5:26, he wrote:

⁵⁵Claud Studebaker, "Importance of Christian Baptism," *The Brethren Evangelist* 56:24 (16 June 1934) 7.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 8.

⁵⁸Claud Studebaker, "The Importance of Christian Baptism—Second Article," *The Brethren Evangelist* 56:31 (11 August 1934) 8.

My first conclusion was, there is no cleansing of my heart by the word, unless I obey the word. No matter what your spiritual understanding, no disobedient soul will be cleansed by the word. I think of Naaman, when the prophet speaking the word of God without any show of power of the Almighty, quietly sent word, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." (II Kings 5:10). I believe if Naaman had not dipped himself seven times in the Jordan river he would not have been cleansed. The word cleansed him, but the word said, "dip in water," and therefore, if he had expected the word to cleanse without water, he would have no doubt have died a leper. The water did not cleanse, his obedience did not cleanse, but he could not have the cleansing of the word without obedience to it, and if the word involved water and dipping in it, then in order for the word to cleanse, everything that the word says must be done.⁵⁹

After quoting a large number of New Testament texts in which obedience is the emphasis, he concluded: "Certainly, these texts are sufficient to emphasize the fundamental fact that, cleansing, begetting, purifying your souls, being born again, partaking of divine nature, is accomplished obedience to the word of God which liveth and abideth forever."⁶⁰

I. D. Bowman furthered the debate in The Brethren Church as he affirmed of the gospel: "Part of the story of salvation is told in one place and part in another. It takes the *whole* Gospel to tell the whole story of salvation."⁶¹ He added:

Let us take the message of the whole Gospel, and not merely a part of it. Faith is necessary, most assuredly, but we also read of the necessity of Repentance, Baptism, Conversion, Regeneration, Confession, Calling on the Name of the Lord, Hope, Love, Obedience to the whole Gospel according to the light and ability that we have. We accept the whole Gospel for ultimate and complete salvation.⁶²

L. S. Bauman responded to Bowman and to George T. Ronk, whose moderator's address before the 1935 Illiokota District was reprinted in *The Brethren Evangelist* and included criticism of what he branded a Neo-Calvinism which threatened Brethren values.⁶³ Bauman's chief concerns were the emphasis on baptism and the Sermon on the Mount.

⁵⁹Claud Studebaker, "Cleansing By The Word," *The Brethren Evangelist* 58:22 (6 June 1936) 7.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

⁶¹I. D. Bowman, "Progressive Unfolding of God's Plan of Salvation," *The Brethren Evangelist* 57:48 (14 December 1935) 12.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³George T. Ronk, "Freedom—Mediation—Sainthood," *The Brethren Evangelist* 57:49 (21 December 1935) 2, 19–20; and 57:50 (28 December 1935) 12–14.

He used an experience to challenge what he viewed as a potentially dangerous over-estimation of believer's baptism.

We shall never forget that once upon a time, we asked a very stalwart Brethren brother whether or not sprinkling was baptism. "Certainly not!" was the emphatic response; "baptism means dipping, and if you are not dipped, you are not baptized!" Later on, we put this question to him: "Brother, do you believe a man can be saved without baptism?" "Certainly not," said he; "the Bible settles that! 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved!'" At a later date, this brother was urging us to attend "a wonderful conference," saying that it was proving "such a great spiritual blessing" to him. We replied: "Brother _____, the speakers on that program are nearly all sprinkled Presbyterians. Therefore, they have not been baptized. Therefore, they are not saved."⁶⁴

Bauman sought to prove that salvation is only by grace through faith without interacting with the issue which produced the conflict, that is, differing definitions of salvation. Bauman focused upon the moment of rebirth while other Brethren focused on the life that was produced by the faith professed. Both suffered from a short-sightedness which could not see the other position in proper perspective. This problem is evident as Bauman again stressed that the Sermon on the Mount is not gospel.

It is the very essence of the holy law of God. It is the finest standard for moral living ever formulated. It is utterly divine! No child of God will fail to profit by its teaching. And yet, IT DOES NOT CONTAIN A SINGLE LINE OF THE GOSPEL (i.e., the "good news") of CHRIST. It is the *law* of Christ, not the *Gospel* of Christ.⁶⁵

Again, the issue of the Brethren distinction between Old Testament law and New Testament law was not addressed. On the other hand, the traditional Brethren writers failed to account for the close affinity of the Sermon on the Mount to the Mosaic legislation.

I. D. Bowman tried to steer a course between faith and works as he also sought to maintain a middle road between Calvinistic and Arminian soteriology. He valued the Calvinist emphasis on salvation by grace but was concerned about the underestimating of obedience. He commended the Arminian emphasis on obedience to God but was concerned that it tended to overlook that emphasis on salvation by grace.⁶⁶ Recognizing the importance of the conflict confronting the

⁶⁴Louis S. Bauman, "SALVATION: By the Working of Law? or, 'By Grace Through Faith?'," 58:1 (4 January 1936) 7.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁶I. D. Bowman, "Grace and Obedience," *The Brethren Evangelist* 60:18 (30 April 1938) 17.

denomination, he concluded: "A proper balance between grace and works of faith is hard to attain so we should seek the unity of the Spirit, pray for the love of God that never faileth and that we be one in Christ, dwelling together in unity."⁶⁷ The next year witnessed the division of The Brethren Church.

CONCLUSION

With its theme "The Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible," and the refusal to adopt a confessional formula to identify with a particular doctrinal position, the Brethren found themselves wrestling with the problem of differing interpretations of the scriptures by men committed to the same Lord and the same scripture testimony. Winds of social change and theological development created circumstances where conflicting interpretations of the Word of God issued forth from within the same tradition. The most grievous fact is that, though certain divisions of the church may have been inevitable due to the forces that drove the differing factions, there was apparent failure to understand, or even attempt to understand, the opposition.

Throughout Brethren history, the Mosaic law has been viewed as surpassed by the New Covenant message of Christ. The issue of the relationship of the Christian to Mosaic legislation did not pose a problem for the Brethren who focused on the New Covenant. But controversy has developed concerning the content of the message of the New Covenant.

That New Covenant message is the good news, the gospel. But what is the gospel? Is it the message of Jesus crucified, buried and raised from the dead? Or is it the whole New Testament formula for Christian experience: repentance, faith, baptism and a life of obedience? What is the place of the Sermon on the Mount? Is it the revelation of what was intended in Mosaic law and, therefore, applicable only to a law economy, or is it the embodiment of the commands of Jesus to be practiced by His followers who are responsible to observe whatever He has commanded?

With regard to the human responsibility in salvation, what is faith? Is it a commitment to Christ as Savior in a punctiliar sense, a decision made at a particular point of time or is it dynamic force which bears fruit in continued obedience to the ordinances of the New Testament? Does faith bring new birth which then makes possible obedience or is saving faith of such a quality that obedience flows from it?

It is of interest to Brethren that a segment of evangelicalism today is wrestling with a concept called Lordship salvation. Those identified

⁶⁷Ibid., 19.

as advocating Lordship salvation are occasionally accused of capitulating to a principle of Reformed, or Covenant, theology. However, for almost three centuries, a non-Calvinistic movement has been calling for saving faith to be evidenced in obedience. This movement, small in comparison to the major denominations, has long struggled to define appropriately the gospel and relate its message properly to the commands of God. Tragically, this striving to understand and define has on occasion been one factor, among other conflicts, which has resulted in schism as some in the conflict have been unable to understand, and/or, appreciate the perspective of the opposition. Brethren history demonstrates the debate about the content of the "good news" can lead to "bad news" for the church if the call of the Lord to love and unity is ignored by brothers and sisters in Christ.