

From Second Work to Secondary Status: The Shifting Role of Holiness Theology in the Brethren in Christ Church

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In 1995, the Center for Brethren in Christ Studies (now Sider Institute) at Messiah College convened a nation-wide study conference centered on exploring denominational identity.¹ Scores of church leaders, pastors, scholars, and laypeople gathered for the two-day event. The keynote speaker was Luke Keefer Jr., a professor at Ashland Theological Seminary and a Brethren in Christ theologian and church historian.² On its face, Keefer's keynote address centered on objectively interpreting the "three theological streams" or traditions by which the Brethren in Christ had traditionally defined their religious heritage: Anabaptism, Pietism, and Wesleyanism. Yet like Drury, Keefer also took the opportunity to critique his tribe.³ The Brethren in Christ, he averred, have entered in the final decades of the twentieth century "with a badly eroded sense of identity."⁴ As evidence, he pointed to the erosion of the church's commitment to a Wesleyan theology

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¹ The conference was held in November 3-4, 1995 on the campus of Messiah College. For background and manuscript versions of the papers presented at the conference, see *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 19, no. 1 (April 1996).

² For a biography of Keefer, see Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, "Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer," in *Worthy of the Calling: Biographies of Paul and Lela Swalm Hostetler, Harvey and Erma Heise Sider, and Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer*, ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, PA.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2014), 223-351.

³ Luke L. Keefer Jr., "The Three Streams in Our Heritage: Separate or Parts of a Whole?" *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 19, no. 1 (April 1996): 26-63. The article was subsequently reprinted, with modifications, as "Brethren in Christ: Uneasy Synthesis of Heritage Streams," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 92-110. My citations are from the original article in *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.

⁴ Keefer Jr., 44.

of sanctification.⁵ He acknowledged the persistence of Wesleyan-holiness thought in denominational discourse: doctrinal statements continued to use the language of “full surrender,” “consecration,” and “the holy life,” and denominational statements continued to identify Wesleyanism as one of the theological traditions shaping the Brethren in Christ character. And yet, he observed, those who identify “with the Wesleyan . . . side of our heritage . . . are minority voices. . . . If our denomination were suddenly deprived of members above age sixty, there would scarcely be a Wesleyan note in our understanding of sanctification.”⁶ Keefer blamed this devolution on the church’s gradual acculturation into the dominant cultures of North American society, as well as its increasing investment in American Evangelicalism. He claimed that “[m]any pastors in recent years would find the Evangelical stance [of progressive sanctification in this life, culminating in entire sanctification at glorification] more palatable than Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification.”⁷ These forces, he concluded, have “substantially blunted our Wesleyan voice.”⁸

Keefer’s talk stressed the imperiled position of the doctrine of holiness within the North American Brethren in Christ community. At a critical moment in the life of the church, Keefer could find only a thread pulse of holiness in his denominational body.

Sanctification in Brethren in Christ scholarship

Since the 1960s, Brethren in Christ intellectuals have produced a steady stream of historical and theological scholarship on their denomination.⁹ Virtually all of this literature has agreed that the earliest Brethren in Christ

⁵ Keefer also identified other evidences of this erosion of denominational identity, including sharp declines in adherence to the church’s position of peace and nonparticipation in war, and to its commitment to simple living, both embodied in its Anabaptist heritage. See Keefer Jr., 42, 56-60.

⁶ Keefer Jr., 44, 40.

⁷ Keefer Jr., 40.

⁸ Keefer Jr., 41.

⁹ An early, hagiographic history of the denomination is A. W. Climenhaga, *History of the Brethren in Christ Church* (Nappanee, IN.: E.V. Publishing House, 1942), but the majority of critical history appeared at least two decades later. The standard denominational history of the Brethren in Christ is Carlton O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Publishing House, 1978). Other major studies include Owen H. Alderfer, “The Mind of the Brethren in Christ:

were influenced by two theological traditions, Anabaptism and Pietism. It has likewise agreed that, since the late nineteenth century, the church has reflected the influence of a third tradition: the American holiness movement. Several studies have examined the process by which the Brethren in Christ embraced and codified a distinctively Wesleyan-holiness understanding of sanctification, a doctrinal position in place since at least the 1930s.⁹ Yet beyond Keefer's 1995 analysis, little attention has been paid to the status of the doctrine since the middle decades of the twentieth century. This article builds on Keefer's analysis, which was primarily theological, by historicizing the shifts in holiness theology among the Brethren in Christ between the 1940s and the early twenty-first century. It moves beyond the aspirational realm of stated doctrine and into the lived reality of Brethren in Christ sanctuaries, homes, camp meetings, and administrative board rooms. In doing so, it shows that although the stated holiness doctrine of the church remained stable during the last 70 years of the twentieth century, the church's *practice* of holiness changed significantly. In the ways they preached and pursued holiness, the Brethren in Christ transformed sanctification from a second work of grace to a matter of secondary status.

⁹ (continued) A Synthesis of Revivalism and the Church as Total Community" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1964); Martin H. Schrag, "The Brethren in Christ Attitude Toward the 'World': A Historical Study of the Movement from Separation to an Increasing Acceptance of American Society" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1967); E. Morris Sider, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada: Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Publishing House, 1988); Keefer Jr., "The Three Streams in Our Heritage"; and Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, "Born Again Brethren in Christ: Anabaptism, Evangelicalism, and the Cultural Transformation of a Plain People," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 1 (April 2016): 210-217. A revisionist study providing a counter-argument about the church's theological identity is D. Ray Hostetter, *The Soul of the Brethren in Christ: Essays in Church History* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Press, 2009). In addition to these major studies, since the late 1970s a variety of scholarly and popular articles have been published in *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, the journal of the Brethren in Christ Historical Society.

¹⁰ See, among others, Climenhaga, 296-298; Carlton O. Wittlinger, "The Impact of Wesleyan Holiness on the Brethren in Christ to 1910," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49, no. 4 (October 1975): 259-283; Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, esp. chapters 11 and 14; Martin H. Schrag, "Benjamin Hardin Irwin and the Brethren in Christ," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 4, no. 2 (December 1981): 89-126; Owen H. Alderfer, "Acceptance of the Holiness Doctrine by the Brethren in Christ Church, 1910-1937," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 15, no. 3 (December 1992): 397-421; and Luke L. Keefer Jr., "Holiness: A Brethren in Christ Case Study," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 22, no. 1 (April 1999): 63-89.

A variety of forces contributed to this transformation. First, and most importantly, second-work sanctification was never universally embraced by all Brethren in Christ clergy and laypeople; as far back as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some resisted or rejected the doctrine in favor of a view that stressed progress over time rather than an instantaneous experience. Second, as early as the 1920s and 1930s, the church experienced the pressures of acculturation into white, middle-class American society. By the middle decades of the century, this growing sense of social respectability, in tandem with creeping concerns about muted evangelistic success and a lack of new members in their congregations, pushed the Brethren in Christ to abandon many of its external symbols of social separatism and to downplay the holiness theology that undergirded them. At the same time, the church's formal and informal affiliation with post-World War II American neo-Evangelicalism provided a theological justification for this acculturation, enabling the church's leaders to couch the turn away from principled separatism in the rhetoric of mission, outreach, and church growth. Third, a growing lack of support for the doctrine among credentialed Brethren in Christ ministers, starting at least in the 1940s and 1950s, further eroded the church's lived commitment to holiness. Fourth, church members in the pew also balked against the doctrine. Some questioned their sanctification experiences, chafed under legalistic teaching and preaching, and reacted against excessive emotionalism. Fifth and finally, affiliation with ecumenical holiness organizations and institutions, especially the National Holiness Association, did little to bolster the church's commitment to a distinctive doctrine of sanctification, even though Brethren in Christ leaders devoted effort and resources to such partnerships. Ultimately, although these forces did not alter the church's doctrinal statements, they had a significant impact on the practice and pursuit of holiness within congregations, camp meetings, and members' homes. Paying attention to this transformation reveals dimensions of the Brethren in Christ story missing from the current historiography.

Yet the changing status of Brethren in Christ holiness theology matters not just for denominational scholarship. It also matters for faith and life today. By confronting this history, Brethren in Christ leaders and laypeople can better grapple with contemporary questions about our theology and

religious practice. What does it mean for Brethren in Christ to live lives of Christian holiness in the twenty-first century? How can we best embody our core belief in “the transforming power of the Holy Spirit”?¹¹ How might we re-commit ourselves, in belief but also in action, to “freedom from the control of sin and in empowerment to live the holy life,” through the guidance of God’s Spirit?¹² By examining our past, we can pursue a better future.

The not-so-quiet in the land

In order to understand the shifting role of holiness theology in the Brethren in Christ Church, some context is necessary. The Brethren in Christ trace their origin to late-eighteenth-century Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. There, German-speaking immigrants, mostly of Mennonite background, embraced the teachings of radical Pietism, especially the need for warm-hearted conversion.¹³ Like their Mennonite and Amish co-religionists, early Brethren in Christ developed a reputation as the “quiet in the land.” In part, this quietism developed from a literal yet selective interpretation of the biblical injunctions to “resist not evil” and to “come out from among them, and be ye separate.”¹⁴ Members refused to serve in the military, swear oaths, pursue litigation, hold political office, or exercise the franchise. These distinctly countercultural practices eventually became codified as the church’s doctrine of nonresistance. Along with nonresistance, the Brethren in Christ also embraced a doctrine of nonconformity, a theological and social-structural arrangement intended to distinguish members from their North American neighbors through alternative patterns of dress, speech, consumption, and recreation. In time, nonconformity came to demand

¹¹ On this core value, see Luke L. Keefer Jr., “Experiencing God’s Love and Grace,” in *Focusing Our Faith: Brethren in Christ Core Values*, ed. Terry L. Bensing (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Publishing House, 2000), 13-25.

¹² “Articles of Faith and Doctrine,” in *Manual of Doctrine and Government of the Brethren in Christ U.S.* (Grantham, PA.: General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church, 2016), 12.

¹³ The origins of the Brethren in Christ are described in Wittlinger, chs. 1-2. The group used the informal name “River Brethren” until the mid-nineteenth century, but I use the more recognizable name throughout this section.

¹⁴ Respectively, these injunctions appear in Matt. 5:39 and 2 Cor. 6:17 (King James Version).

separation from certain social activities and individual vices within modern American life: dancing, watching movies, drinking alcohol, using tobacco, and playing organized sports, among others. It also necessitated prescribed forms of “plain dress”: Women wore ankle-length dresses in muted colors, head coverings and bonnets, without jewelry or adornment, while men wore dark suits with upright collars and no neckties. These practices drew sharp and visible boundaries between the Brethren in Christ and their neighbors, including many Protestant and Catholic co-religionists.¹⁵

Yet at the same time, the Brethren in Christ were also engaged with the American Protestant mainstream. From the start of their movement, they embraced warm-hearted conversion, revivalism, and devotional prayer and Bible reading—all practices that marked them as distinctively Pietist. Later, during the late nineteenth century, they embraced a number of outward-looking Protestant innovations such as domestic and foreign missionary work, benevolent institutions, church-sponsored schools and colleges, and the use of mass media, as exemplified by the church’s newspaper, the *Evangelical Visitor*.¹⁶ These factors linked the Brethren in Christ to the broader world, even as they remained ensconced within their particular ethnic subculture.

The promise of perfection

Such examples of selective borrowing from evangelical Protestantism help to explain why, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Brethren in Christ gradually embraced an understanding of sanctification as a second work of grace subsequent to justification—an understanding that they gleaned from their increasingly frequent interactions with segments of the American holiness movement. Mid- to late-nineteenth century migration

¹⁵ On Brethren in Christ nonconformity and nonresistance before the mid-twentieth century, see Wittlinger, 102-124; Schrag, “The Brethren in Christ Attitude Toward the World,” 55-76, 154-192; and M. J. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Position Through Three Generations* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Wittlinger, 162-200, 258-269, and 284-317. For this trend among Mennonites, see James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 106-188.

took the Brethren in Christ away from the eastern centers of church life—Pennsylvania, Ohio, and southern Ontario, Canada—to rural, Midwestern places like Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, and beyond.¹⁷ In these places, removed from the watchful eyes of conservative leadership, ministers and laypeople encountered new varieties of Christian faith and practice, including expressions of holiness fervor. These unfamiliar expressions challenged long-established beliefs about sanctification. Since their eighteenth-century origins, the Brethren in Christ had understood this move of grace as beginning with regeneration and initiating a life-long process of incremental maturation in righteousness—a “growth according to the Holy Scriptures” into perfection, according to the church’s earliest confession of faith.¹⁸ But contacts with the Free Methodists, the Salvation Army, the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association, and other groups popularized among some church members a new understanding of sanctification as an instantaneous second work of grace subsequent to regeneration.¹⁹

Evidence of holiness teaching appeared in Brethren in Christ literature as early as the 1870s,²⁰ but the most sharply defined expressions of second-

¹⁷ On the migrations of the Brethren in Christ in the nineteenth century, see Wittlinger, 145-161. On the Kansas Brethren in Christ specifically, see Wilma I. Musser, *Brethren in Christ Churches in Kansas* (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1991). These Midwestern states had already begun to feel the influence of the originally northern, urban holiness movement by the late nineteenth century. My characterization of the origins and subsequent spread of the holiness movement is shaped by Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), chs. 1-4. For the parallel spread of the northern holiness movement into the U.S. South, see Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ On the early Brethren in Christ understanding of sanctification, see Wittlinger, 58-59; Luke L. Keefer Jr., “Holiness: A Brethren in Christ Historical Case Study,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 22, no. 1 (April 1999): 63-64. For the earliest (eighteenth-century) confession of faith, see “A Copy of the Confession of Faith of the Brethren,” trans. William M. Meikle, in Wittlinger, 551-554 (quotation, 552).

¹⁹ On the influence of “holiness societies” on the Brethren in Christ, see Wittlinger, 227, 236-240; Luke L. Keefer Jr., “The Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association and Its Influence Upon the Brethren in Christ Church,” *Notes and Queries in Brethren in Christ History* 4, no. 1 (January-March 1963): 1-11; and Charles Edwin Jones, “Co-Incidence of Piety and Conviction: The Brethren in Christ and the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Society,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 32, no. 3 (December 2009): 421-435. For similar forces acting on Mennonites, especially in the Midwest, see William C. Kostlevy, “Perfecting Mennonites: The Holiness Movement’s Impact on Mennonites with Special Reference to Kansas,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 34, no. 2 (August 2011): 213-236.

²⁰ Wittlinger, 228-234.

work theology emerged among the Brethren in Christ in Kansas in the 1880s and 1890s.²¹ In time, this holiness doctrine spread from the Midwest to other corners of the Brethren in Christ Church, largely through articles in the *Visitor* and through the charismatic preaching of a cabal of Brethren in Christ holiness evangelists such as John R. Zook, a minister from Iowa; Orville B. Ulery, a minister and bishop from southern Ohio; and Daniel Steckley, a Canadian minister who popularized holiness teachings north of the U.S. border.²² Beyond the work of male evangelists, women also played a critical role in spreading the holiness message. As some of the most frequent and articulate writers on the holiness message in the *Visitor*, women shared their testimonies, reported on evangelistic services, and published or shared theological and biblical messages on the subject.²³ Through these means, converts to second-work perfectionism began to appear across the North American church by the early twentieth century.

Yet despite enthusiasm in some corners of the church, not all Brethren in Christ readily embraced the doctrine of the holiness movement. So-called traditionalists within the church balked at the intrusion of this new theological concept. Above all else, these members rejected in kind the very notion of theological change: as a conservative group, they did not

²¹ Wittlinger, 234-242; Musser, ch. 10. In the Kansas setting, some members attracted to the holiness message came under the more radical preaching of Benjamin Hardin Irwin, who extended the American holiness movement's notion of sanctification as a second work of grace to include a third work: the "baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire." The influence of Irwin's teachings created brief but significant tension, both locally and throughout the denomination, as well as some movement of Brethren in Christ out of their churches and into Irwin's movement. Eventually, however, the Kansas churches rejected Irwin's beliefs. On Irwin and his church, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, see Synan, 51-60. On the influence of Irwin on the Brethren in Christ, see Wittlinger, 238-240; Schrag, "Benjamin Hardin Irwin"; and Musser, 217-224.

²² Wittlinger, 240-242. For more on Zook and Ulery, see their biographies in E. Morris Sider, *Nine Portraits: Brethren in Christ Biographical Sketches* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Publishing House, 1978).

²³ See, for instance, Mary K. Landis, "Entire Sanctification," *Evangelical Visitor*, August 1, 1896, 238-239; Eva Sawyer, "Holiness," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 15, 1897, 53-54; Mary Wismer, "Experience," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 1, 1897, 70-71; Mary K. Landis, "Obedience," *Evangelical Visitor*, August 1, 1897, 238; Fannie Burkholder, "A Letter," *Evangelical Visitor*, September 15, 1897, 301-302; Leah Eshelman, "Sanctified by Obedience," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 15, 1897, 86; Annie S. Lehman, "Whose Servants Are We?" *Evangelical Visitor*, June 1, 1899, 203-204; Mamie Hoffer, "Be Ye Holy; For I am Holy," *Evangelical Visitor*, November 1, 1899, 403-404; Amanda Snyder, "Deep," *Evangelical Visitor*, October 1, 1901, 370; ...

warm to any such modifications to faith and practice. Others bristled at the emotionalism and extremism that tended to characterize segments of the holiness movement; still others feared that the movement exalted private religious experience above the corporate notions of obedience that had long characterized the Brethren in Christ faith. Traditionalists especially rejected the concept of an instantaneous second work of grace, believing it to be basically unscriptural.²⁴ Such resistance demonstrates that, even from the first decades in which holiness teaching touched the Brethren in Christ, the doctrine was always contested and never fully embraced by all church members.

Amid this growing enthusiasm, in 1887 the church's governing body, the General Conference, passed a new doctrinal article on sanctification that, according to Wittlinger, "shift[ed the church] toward moderate accommodation to perfectionism" while still maintaining the original confession of faith's emphasis on sanctification as a process.²⁵ By 1910, however, the tide was turning. The perfectionist contingent pushed for a more radical stance, forcing the General Conference to develop yet another new statement. Wittlinger concludes that this statement "moved [Brethren in Christ] considerably closer to the position of sanctification as a second

²³ (continued) Amanda Snyder, "Holy Brotherhood," *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1, 1901, 446; Mrs. C. D. Erb, "Tame Holiness," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 16, 1903, 7; Mrs. C. D. Erb, "The Additions of Sanctification," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 1, 1904, 7; Mary Macklem, "Be Filled with the Spirit," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 1, 1904, 9; Ada Wolgemuth, "Be Filled with the Spirit," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 1, 1905, 10; Annie E. Wenger, "Consecration," *Evangelical Visitor*, November 1, 1905, 6; Emma Long Dohner, "Not Self, But Thee," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 15, 1905, 16; Iva C. Herr, "Entire Sanctification or the Blessing of Perfect Love," *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1, 1906, 4; Emma Dohner, "How the Lord Dealt with Me," *Evangelical Visitor*, January 1, 1908, 9; Mary McNeal, "An Experience," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 26, 1909, 8; Mary J. Long, "The Need of the Anointing," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 15, 1909, 8; Mazy Dohner, "A Work of Grace," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 29, 1912, 14; Martha Heisey, "A Warning Note," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 5, 1913, 16; Hettie Kready, ". . .Writes about Sanctification . . ." *Evangelical Visitor*, December 15, 1913, 5; Sarah Climenhaga, "The Fall and Restoration of Man," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 28, 1915, 27; Mazy Dohner, "He is Able," *Evangelical Visitor*, October 2, 1922, 5; Lela Pierce, "We Must Go the Death Route of Self Before God's Approval is on Us," *Evangelical Visitor*, September 29, 1924, 11; Ida W. Cassel, "Sanctification—What is It?" *Evangelical Visitor*, July 30, 1934, 244.

²⁴ Wittlinger, 242-244.

²⁵ Wittlinger, 231-234 (quotation, 233).

work of grace,” but also “specifically reject[ed] the terminology ‘second definite work of grace’” as a concession to the traditionalist contingent within the church²⁶

But this compromise did not contain the ardor of the perfectionists for long.²⁷ Over a two-decade period, these progressives gained the upper hand within the internecine debates. For instance, in 1918 perfectionists ousted the moderate editor of the *Visitor* and installed a pro-holiness replacement, essentially transforming the publication into a vehicle for promoting the second-work doctrine.²⁸ At the same time, well-known proponents of the second-work position published treatises promulgating the doctrine.²⁹ Within two decades, perfectionists pushed the church to once again revise its doctrinal statement on holiness.³⁰ The resultant document, ratified by General Conference in 1937, made a critical modification to church teaching: It redefined sanctification for the Brethren in Christ as an immediate, completed event—an experience “obtained instantaneously and subsequent to the new birth.” It still eschewed the controversial language of “second work of grace,” thus never linking the church to the mainstream of the holiness movement. Yet it implied the theological content of that language in its redefinition, making sanctification not a gradual process but a sudden, singular moment.³¹ In this redefinition, the traditionalists lost and

²⁶ Wittlinger, 246-247.

²⁷ On continued conflict over holiness among Brethren in Christ after 1910, see Wittlinger, 322-325.

²⁸ Wittlinger, 325-328.

²⁹ See, for instance, John R. Zook, *Holiness and Empowerment Both Defined: How to Obtain Them, How to Retain Them* (Des Moines, Iowa: n.p., 1919). In this tract, Zook carefully avoided the exact language of “second work of grace,” yet boldly declared that “[e]ntire sanctification . . . is INSTANTANEOUS. . . [T]he moment we have met the condition, the blessings is ours.” His claims directly challenged the process orientation of the traditionalists.

³⁰ Other forces also popularized holiness across the denomination during this period. For instance, the transformation of Brethren in Christ hymnody through two successive hymnals—1906’s *Spiritual Hymns* and 1935’s *Spiritual Songs and Hymns*, introduced holiness movement music into the church’s repertory and added numerous songs about sanctification, consecration, “heart purity,” and other holiness topics into the books’ indices. Many of these songs communicated the theological content of second-work sanctification, even if not always using that exact language. On these musical changes, see Wittlinger, 218-220; H. Royce Saltzman, “A Historical Study of the Function of Music Among the Brethren in Christ” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1964), 165-171, 181-188; Dwight W. Thomas, “From Living Room to Sanctuary: Reflections on Brethren in Christ Worship,” in *Windows to the Church: Selections from Twenty-Five Years of Brethren in Christ History and Life*, ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, PA.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2003), 261-262; and Thomas, “Holiness Songs Then and Now,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 1 (April 2008): 96-100.

³¹ “Art. IV: Sanctification,” *Constitution, Doctrine, By-Laws and Rituals of the Brethren in Christ Church* (Nappanee, IN.: E. V. Publishing House, 1937), 15-16 (quotation, 16).

the perfectionists won. Wittlinger calls this moment in the church's history "the triumph of second-work holiness."³²

Why would the church make this pivotal shift at this particular moment? A variety of answers are possible. Of course, the power of the perfectionists within the General Conference made possible the passage of the new statement. But major social and cultural changes in American life might also have persuaded leaders within the conservative group to take a firm stance on sanctification. By the 1930s, the Brethren in Christ had begun to feel the impact of these changes. Urbanization, industrialization, advances in technology, a world war, the growth of cultural pluralism, the ever-enlarging rift between so-called modernist and fundamentalist factions within Protestantism, and more challenged the church in many ways, putting to the test their doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance. They responded to these challenges in part by fully embracing a doctrine that promised to help them live out their decidedly separatist posture toward the surrounding world. The experience of total sanctification—of dying to the "old man," of consecrating one's life to Christ, and of feeling the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—offered the spiritual power necessary to fulfill the high demands of the Brethren in Christ's countercultural faith. In other words, for many Brethren in Christ the experience of total sanctification tended to strengthen their commitment to and practice of "the ways of the Brethren." Reports published in the *Visitor* of Brethren in Christ revival services and holiness camp meetings suggest that new converts and members seeking entire sanctification could not "pray through" to the filling of the Spirit without first dying to their pride and committing to the "plain way" of the church.³³ Thus, the church's sharp turn toward a full-throated perfectionist

³² See the title of his chapter on these developments: "Ch. 14: The Triumph of Second-Work Holiness."

³³ For examples, see "Florin, Pa.," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 8 and 22, 1920, 14; A. L. Eisenhower, "Sanctification," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 30, 1928, 10-11, 15; Adda G. Wolgemuth, "The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire," *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1, 1930, 22; M. E. W., "Gleanings from the Roxbury Revival," *Evangelical Visitor*, November 11, 1935, 361. General Conference- and district-level statements published during this period also tended to link the experience of holiness to the doctrine of nonconformity; see, for instance, "Scriptural Standard of Dress," tract published by the Brethren in Christ Church (Nappanee, IN.: E. V. Publishing House, n.d.), 4-5, and *Minutes of the Pennsylvania State Council*, 1927, 14-16. Other scholars have also pointed to this linkage; see Alderfer, "The Mind of the Brethren in Christ," 253-258, and Keefer, Jr., "The Three Streams in Our Heritage," 36.

position in the early decades of the twentieth century had everything to do with resolving their sense of peril.³⁴

The triumph of second-work sanctification?

This triumph of second-work sanctification—its codification at the General Conference of 1937 and its apparent reinforcement of the church’s longstanding doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance—set off a flurry of holiness activity within the church. First and foremost, it inspired the founding of several holiness camps throughout the United States and Canada: Roxbury Holiness Camp in Pennsylvania (1935), Ontario Holiness Camp in Ontario, Canada (1941), and Memorial Holiness Camp in Ohio (1944).³⁵ It also inspired missionary activity. In the late 1930s and early 1940s a handful of recently sanctified Brethren in Christ carried the church’s holiness message to new communities. Through a series of highly emotional, even proto-charismatic revival meetings, they established new Brethren in Christ congregations in the Allegheny Mountains of western Pennsylvania and in rural southern Kentucky.³⁶ Meanwhile, the church periodical, the *Evangelical Visitor*, continued to churn out articles on holiness, from doctrinal treatises to devotional texts, personal testimonies, and more.

From a certain perspective, these outcomes seem to reinforce Wittlinger’s observation about the “triumph” of second-work holiness. Yet if

³⁴ On this period in Brethren in Christ history, see Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, “‘Unity in Diversity’: Negotiating Communal Boundaries in the Brethren in Christ Church, 1930-1950,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 40, no. 3 (December 2017), 353-375. For a parallel move within segments of the broader holiness movement concerned with the encroachment of “worldliness,” see Wallace Thornton, Jr., “Behavioral Standards, Embourgeoisement, and the Formation of the Conservative Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 172-197.

³⁵ On Roxbury Holiness Camp, see E. Morris Sider, *Holiness Unto the Lord: The Story of Roxbury Holiness Camp* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1985) and Sider, *A Living and Growing Ministry: The Story of Roxbury Holiness Camp* (Roxbury, PA: Roxbury Holiness Camp/Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2010). On other camps, see Wittlinger, 336.

³⁶ For the story of holiness-inspired missionary activity in western Pennsylvania, see E. Morris Sider, *Fire in the Mountains: The Story of a Revival Movement in Central Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2010). For the Kentucky story, see Wittlinger, 448; Albert E. Engle, *Saved to Serve in Kentucky . . . and More!* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1977); and Dortha Dohner, “M. L. Dohner and the Beginning of the Brethren in Christ Work in Kentucky,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 14, no. 3 (December 1991): 396-414.

considered from another vantage, these same developments might point to an entirely different reality—one in which the doctrine had far less universal stability. We cannot say with much certainty if the pitched battles between perfectionists and traditionalists in the early twentieth century were fair fights: What if the traditionalists grossly outnumbered the perfectionists, but the latter group simply had louder advocates? What if the codification of instantaneous sanctification at the 1937 General Conference reflected not a broad consensus about the experience, its timing, and its nature, but rather a narrow unanimity shared primarily by the architects of the statement? What if the influence of holiness preaching and teaching was isolated to a few geographical centers: western Pennsylvania, Kentucky, the Midwest, and in the vicinity of the holiness camps scattered throughout North America? And what if the writing on holiness that filled the pages of the *Visitor* reflected not confidence about the doctrine, but a sense that a skeptical church had to be indoctrinated into a set of beliefs about the necessity of a second work of grace?

Unfortunately, the Archives of the Brethren in Christ Church lack the kinds of sources necessary to penetrate deeply into the lived experiences of church members in the 1920s and 1930s. So it is difficult to say with any sense of certainty how scholars should interpret the alleged “triumph” of holiness in these years. But developments within the church in the 1940s, 1950s, and beyond suggest that at least by these decades, Brethren in Christ holiness felt far less triumphant and far more contested and criticized.

Revisiting the holiness “triumph”

If the Brethren in Christ’s embrace of a new doctrine of sanctification in 1937 was intended, at least in part, to protect the church from the advent of cultural modernity, it failed to achieve its desired end. By the 1940s and 1950s, some church members and even some leaders experienced visible acculturation into the dominant cultures of North American society. Historically an agrarian society, many Brethren in Christ in these decades entered into new vocations in business, education, and other professions. Many increasingly pursued higher education, primarily (but not exclusively) at church-related schools. During World War II, many Brethren in Christ men accepted alternative service rather than military conscription, while others

enlisted as noncombatants and, more rarely, as combatants. In all of these new settings—vocational, educational, and otherwise—church members and leaders faced as never before questions about their plain dress, their nonviolent convictions, and their suspicion of “worldly” entertainment. In short, many felt pressure to abandon their nonconformist ways. Those who did so risked the censure of the church; those who did not, the skepticism of their neighbors and co-workers.³⁷

Around the same time that they faced these acculturating pressures, the Brethren in Christ also encountered the neo-evangelical movement. Though rooted in the separatistic fundamentalism of the 1920s and 1930s, neo-Evangelicalism represented a socially engaged form of conservative Protestantism, eager to “win America for Christ” by communicating their gospel message in the vernacular of white, middle-class popular culture.³⁸ Rubbing elbows with these evangelicals in ecumenical groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals made some Brethren in Christ leaders self-conscious about their group’s small size and relative lack of evangelistic success. Many began to see the church’s regulations of nonconformist and nonresistant practice as “legalism” and as barriers to effective outreach.³⁹

³⁷ On challenges to nonconformity and nonresistance in the 1930s and 1940s, see Wittlinger, chs. 15-16; David L. Weaver-Zercher, “Open (to) Arms: The Status of the Peace Position in the Brethren in Christ Church,” in *Windows to the Church: Selections from Twenty-Five Years of Brethren in Christ History and Life*, ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2003), 209-226; David L. Weaver-Zercher, “Improvising Faithfulness: A Brief History of Brethren in Christ Nonconformity,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 40, no. 1 (April 2017): 124-129; and Manzullo-Thomas, “Unity in Diversity,” 360-363.

³⁸ Scholarship on post-World War II evangelicalism is vast, but for this narrative the most salient studies include include Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan D. Ree, 2002); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). On fundamentalism, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁹ On these developments, see Wittlinger, 475-482; David L. Zercher, “Opting for the Mainstream: The Brethren Join the National Association of Evangelicals,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 10, no. 1 (April 1987): 48-70; Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, “Beyond ‘Indianapolis ’50’: The Brethren in Christ Church in an Age of Evangelicalism,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 36, no. 3 (December 2013): 433-463; and Manzullo-Thomas, “Born-Again Brethren in Christ.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, the General Conference commissioned the Church Review and Study Committee to review and revise the structures and practices of the church, so that the church might minister more effectively. The result of their work was a wide-ranging reconsideration of the church's separatist stance; by 1965, the church no longer required its members to wear a proscribed church uniform of plain dress and it no longer threatened those who enlisted in the military with disfellowship.⁴⁰

As it downplayed earlier standards of nonconformity and nonresistance, the church also tended to speak less and less about the doctrine of holiness. While the *Visitor* in the 1920s and 1930s had been practically a holiness journal, by the 1950s and 1960s the number of holiness-themed articles dropped off precipitously.⁴¹ In the realm of official doctrine, a new statement published in 1961 essentially replicated the 1937 statement, but placed "slightly less emphasis upon the perfection reached at sanctification" and left "a little more room for progressive growth," according to one analysis.⁴² Though modest, even this change testifies to the ways in which the doctrine of holiness was downplayed by leaders in these decades. As bishops and ministers moderated the principled separatism of past generations and cloaked these changes in the evangelical-inspired rhetoric of mission and church growth, they also laid less stress on holiness.

While some older church leaders downplayed the doctrine, some newer leaders questioned it altogether. This lack of new ministerial support for second-work sanctification became evident to Luke Keefer Sr., a bishop from rural central Pennsylvania, when he joined the Brethren in Christ's

⁴⁰ On the Church Review and Study Committee, see Wittlinger, 483-492.

⁴¹ An index for the *Visitor* housed in the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives lists only six articles under the subject heading "holiness" between 1950-1959, and only four under the subject heading "sanctification" during those same years. The index of *Visitor* articles for the decade between 1960-1969 remains incomplete, but it is hard to imagine the number of articles on these subjects rising considerably during those 10 years. While the index may not represent a comprehensive or fully accurate cataloguing of all articles written on these subjects during this period, it does indicate that fewer articles were written on these subjects in the denominational periodicals during this period. Moreover, a survey of *Visitor* issues published after 1947 indicate that the publication ceased printing testimonies around that time; such testimonies often promoted the Brethren in Christ understanding of sanctification in their narratives.

⁴² Roger C. Sider, "A Comparative Study of the 1937 and 1961 Doctrinal Statements of the Brethren in Christ Church," *Notes and Queries in Brethren in Christ History* 7, no. 3 (July 1966): 17.

Ministerial Examining Board in 1947. As he wrote in his memoir, Keefer Sr. quickly realized “that there were differences of enthusiasm in the endorsement and promotion of several doctrines which characterized our denomination . . . [including] sanctification.”⁴³ In the case of a few ministerial applicants, their articulation of holiness deviated so far from the church’s 1937 doctrinal position that Keefer “could not conscientiously sign my approval” to their applications.⁴⁴ Such ambivalence on second-work sanctification persisted into the latter decades of the twentieth century. In 1983, for instance, the Messiah College professor Owen Alderfer related a discussion with a student considering ministry in the Brethren in Christ Church. The student told Alderfer that he “just can’t go along with the Brethren in Christ view of a ‘second blessing.’”⁴⁵ Alderfer further revealed that even current ministers credentialed by the Brethren in Christ—including many who grew up in the denomination—likewise rejected the second-work stance in their public ministry:

[N]umbers of pastors with roots in the church have reacted against what they regard to be unrealistic, psychologically unsound, and unbiblical teachings on the subject. In some cases they are reacting against what they perceived as irregularities in the lives of some who proclaimed crucifixion of the self and eradication of the carnal nature. What they discerned as anger and power politics in the church brought disillusionment relative to the doctrine and modification of the teaching on their part.⁴⁶

Though perhaps not universally reflective of Brethren in Christ ministers in the mid-twentieth century, such incidents certainly suggest a diminished embrace of the doctrine by those in the church’s pulpits.

If the church’s holiness doctrine received lackluster support from some ministers and aspiring ministers, it received even less support from many laypeople. For instance, several Brethren in Christ members who

⁴³ Luke L. Keefer Sr., *No Empty Dream: My Psalm of Life* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1990), 149.

⁴⁴ Keefer Sr., 151.

⁴⁵ Owen H. Alderfer, “Rationale for a Colloquy on the Holy Spirit and the Holy Life,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 6, no. 2 (December 1983): 143.

⁴⁶ Alderfer, 146.

came of age in these mid-century decades became repeat seekers at the altar. Under what they perceived as intense pressure, these young people “prayed through” for sanctification only to stumble spiritually days or weeks later, and thus question the sincerity of their experience. For many, these troubling experiences with sanctification were often linked to struggles with the practices associated with the doctrine of nonconformity.

Such was the case for Luke Keefer Jr. In his autobiography, Keefer described his own sanctification experience as a teenager in 1956. This experience promised—in a theological sense—freedom from the desire to sin and consecration to Christ and his service. Yet as Keefer later reflected, “Theological explanations and practical Christian life realities are not infrequently strangers to one another.”⁴⁷ Even after his experience, Keefer continued to struggle not only with overt sin but also with a sense of rebelliousness against the strictures of the denomination, including the issue of plain dress. Only after numerous stumbles, repeated visits to the altar, periodic counseling sessions with his minister-father, and a long period of self-doubt did Keefer “mediat[e]. . . an acceptable truce” between the conflicting parties of theological expectation and personal experience.⁴⁸

In the end Keefer’s experience proved more positive than negative. But, Keefer noted, not everyone of his generation arrived at such an acceptable spiritual compromise. In her autobiography, the long-time Brethren in Christ missionary Grace Herr Holland made much the same point. Because she and her siblings had been taught “that sanctification was [both an instantaneous experience and] also an ongoing process,” they were “spared the struggle of those who questioned their ‘experience’ every time they stumbled.”⁴⁹ Her comments convey the pervasiveness of spiritual struggle among some Brethren in Christ coming of age in the 1940s and 1950s.

⁴⁷ Luke L. Keefer Jr., [Autobiography] in E. Morris Sider, ed., *My Story, My Song: Life Stories by Brethren in Christ Missionaries* (Mt. Joy, PA: Brethren in Christ World Missions, 1989), 304.

⁴⁸ Keefer Jr.; For an analysis of Keefer’s spiritual journey in terms of the Brethren in Christ doctrines of sanctification and nonconformity, see Manzullo-Thomas, “Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer,” ch. 4.

⁴⁹ Grace Herr Holland, *Planting Seeds: A Missionary Story* (Grantham, PA.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2016), 6. This autobiography was published as the August 2016 issue of the journal *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.

For others, holiness represented an impossible ideal. Growing up among the Brethren in Christ in southern California in the 1950s and 1960s, Connie Engle Hoffman heard numerous sermons on holy living and the call to sanctification. Yet she found those teachings “vague and unattainable.” She therefore “had no personal sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit” in her life.⁵⁰ In a 2008 memoir, Hoffman nevertheless observed that coming of age under such teachings had impacted her spiritual journey in adulthood, burdening her with a “desire for perfection” and giving her “difficulty accepting and owning grace.”⁵¹ Hoffman’s reflections point to another occasional criticism of holiness teaching articulated by some Brethren in Christ: that the doctrine has a psychologically unsound impact on some of its hearers.⁵²

Other laypeople balked at the excessive emotionalism that seemed to accompany holiness preaching. One church member, who grew up near the church’s Roxbury Holiness Camp in Pennsylvania, later recalled the humiliation he felt in bringing a non-Brethren in Christ woman to camp on a date:

Once I took a young Mennonite girl to Roxbury when the shouting and hollering started from the pulpit and from the audience. Poor girl, she was mortified, never having seen such in her church and I was embarrassed to explain what was happening—basically I could not understand it either. The relationship quickly dissolved.⁵³

⁵⁰ Connie (Engle) Hoffman, “Where Christ May Dwell,” *In Part*, Summer 2013, 10.

⁵¹ Connie (Engle) Hoffman, “Growing Up Brethren in Christ: The Influence of Home and Congregation,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 2 (August 2008): 302. In later years, Hoffman and her husband, Warren, came into contact with and embraced the influence of the charismatic movement. Connie Hoffman later noted that her charismatic experiences brought her into a more intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit than did any of the holiness teaching of her earliest years. On these experiences, see Hoffman, “Where Christ May Dwell,” 10-11. Warren Hoffman served for many years as a Brethren in Christ minister and missionary, and later became a bishop in Pennsylvania and the moderator of the North American denomination.

⁵² The theologian Owen Alderfer indicated this criticism as one harbored by some Brethren in Christ. See Alderfer, “Rationale for a Colloquy,” 145-146.

⁵³ Unsigned questionnaire, Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas Papers, uncatalogued material, Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Mechanicsburg, PA). This questionnaire was collected as part of my master’s thesis research at Temple University, 2011-2012.

His recollection demonstrates that as some Brethren in Christ experienced upward social mobility in the middle decades of the twentieth century, such “shouting and hollering” became less a symbol of spiritual enthusiasm and more a cause for shame and humiliation.

Still other laypeople perceived the holiness preaching and teaching of the church as a form of legalism. In an autobiographical account, Grace Holland recalled how some of her peers criticized the Brethren in Christ Church of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s for practicing a “works religion.”⁵⁴ Similarly, laywoman Eleanor Poe observed that she grew up listening to harsh, severe sermons and feeling “prolonged pressure [during] altar calls” at her home congregation in Ohio.⁵⁵ In these ways and others, holiness came to be associated by some Brethren in Christ as a “legal ought” rather than a liberation from sin.⁵⁶

Thus in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, a variety of cultural trends, personal experiences, and institutional changes cumulatively impacted the Brethren in Christ’s holiness position. Stated doctrine shifted only modestly back toward a progressivist view. But in practice and in public prominence, the ideas associated with holiness as an instantaneous experience were contested and questioned, if not forthrightly criticized. Indeed, the doctrine seemed much less triumphant in these decades than it had in 1937.

Confidence or crisis?

Yet holiness was far from dead in the Brethren in Christ Church. Somewhat paradoxically, despite contest and criticism, holiness ideas and institutions thrived within the church during the century’s middle decades.

In at least one instance, enthusiasm for the church’s holiness position led to church growth. In 1955, a young Amish couple, Abe and Hannah Yoder,

⁵⁴ Grace (Herr) Holland, “Growing Up Brethren in Christ: The Influence of Home and Congregation,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 2 (August 2008): 255.

⁵⁵ Eleanor (Herr) Poe, “Growing Up Brethren in Christ: The Influence of Home and Congregation,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 2 (August 2008): 305.

⁵⁶ On the Brethren in Christ and legalism, see Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, “Between Legalism and Liberalism: The Brethren in Christ Construct a New (Evangelical) Identity, 1945-1965,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 34, no. 3 (December 2011): 347-386.

experienced entire sanctification during a revival service in rural Juniata County, Pennsylvania, conducted by Brethren in Christ minister Luke Keefer Sr. For a number of years afterward, Keefer conducted a weekly Bible study and prayer meeting with the Yoders and a handful of other sanctified Amish and conservative Mennonites whose holiness experiences had been opposed by their home congregations. By 1959, the small group decided to form a new congregation—the Big Valley Brethren in Christ Church—comprised almost entirely of conservative Anabaptists who had encountered second-work sanctification through the Brethren in Christ.⁵⁷

Holiness institutions also thrived in these decades. For instance, Roxbury Holiness Camp—the first holiness camp founded by the Brethren in Christ in the 1930s—grew by leaps and bounds. Such growth could be assessed solely by the expansion of the physical plant. Between 1940 and 1965, the camp added a new tabernacle, cabins and dormitories, a kitchen, bathroom facilities, buildings for children’s and youth programming, a bookstore, and even a motel to its grounds.⁵⁸ Attendance rates also demonstrate Roxbury’s growth. In the 1970s, the camp experienced record turnout multiple years in a row. In 1978, for instance, over 2,100 people crammed into the camp’s tabernacle for the final Sunday evening service of its two-week program.⁵⁹ During these same decades, the Brethren in Christ associated with Roxbury even launched a new holiness camp meeting: Camp Freedom in St. Petersburg, Florida.⁶⁰

Yet even during these heady years, holiness institutions also worried about their longevity. Roxbury leadership began to express a growing concern about passing on holiness to the next generation as early as the mid-1960s. Camp director and minister Charlie Byers, writing in 1966,

⁵⁷ Abe S. Yoder, Jr., *My Walk with God* (Belleville, PA.: [the author], 2000), 29-33, 77-78.

⁵⁸ Sider, *Holiness Unto the Lord*, chs. 5-6. By its 50th anniversary in 1985, the camp occupied 65 acres at a value of approximately \$250,000.

⁵⁹ Simon A. Lehman Jr., *Ever Green . . . Ever Fruitful, To God Be The Glory: My Life Story* ([Mechanicsburg, PA]: [Unigraphics Communications], [2010]), 214-215. Lehman also records that another Brethren in Christ camp meeting, Camp Freedom in Florida, also had its highest attendance a year later, in 1979.

⁶⁰ On this camp, see Simon A. Lehman Jr., *Free Indeed: The Story of Camp Freedom* (St. Petersburg, FL.: n.p., n.d.), and Dennis L. Ritchey, *So Run!: Camp Freedom—Celebrating Fifty Years of Ministry, 1963-2012* (St. Petersburg, FL.: n.p., 2012).

pleaded with the camp's Board of Directors: "We must get through to the younger generation. A few more frosts and the gray heads will be gone. Then what for Roxbury camp?" His comment seems to suggest that despite high attendance in these years, the vast majority of participants were elderly members of the church.⁶¹ A similar sentiment led Byers to organize a series of sermons on sanctification delivered at the camp meeting of 1982. In his letter inviting a well-respected Brethren in Christ holiness teacher to deliver the lectures, Byers expressed his concern that camp attendees under 35 did not have a clear knowledge of sanctification. "They know the word holiness," he wrote, "[and] they hear talk about sanctification, they listen to the various sermons at Roxbury." But, he concluded, they lack a full understanding of the doctrine and its importance.⁶² To some, the Brethren in Christ's camp meeting program seemed more imperiled than thriving.

The Brethren in Christ also sought to strengthen their holiness bona fides in the middle decades of the twentieth century by developing institutional ties to the broader holiness movement. Historically resistant to ecumenical activity, the Brethren in Christ gradually embraced cooperative ventures in the post-World War II years. In 1949, as previously mentioned, they joined the National Association of Evangelicals.⁶³ A year later, they joined the National Holiness Association (NHA).⁶⁴ Church leaders hoped that joining the interdenominational body would not only "keep our people

⁶¹ Quoted in Sider, *A Living and Growing Ministry*, 138.

⁶² Quoted in Sider, *A Living and Growing Ministry*, 138-139.

⁶³ On Brethren in Christ resistance to formal ecumenical efforts, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Schrag, "Brethren in Christ Attitude," 156-162. The earliest ecumenical efforts by the Brethren in Christ was with the inter-Mennonite relief agency Mennonite Central Committee in the 1930s and 1940s; on their MCC involvement, see Nancy Heisey, "Brethren in Christ Participation in Mennonite Central Committee: Integral Part or Burden?" *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 18, no. 2 (August 1995): 177-227. See note 58 for scholarship on the Brethren in Christ involvement in the National Association of Evangelicals.

⁶⁴ *General Conference Minutes*, 1950, 46-47. This organization changed its name to Christian Holiness Association (CHA) in 1971, and to Christian Holiness Partnership in 1998. In the remainder of this article, I will use the abbreviation that reflects the official name of the agency during the period being discussed.

At least a few church leaders resisted the idea of affiliation. One minister from rural Pennsylvania later recalled that he initially opposed joining the NHA because he feared that doing so might dilute the church's distinctiveness. See Keefer Sr., 157. General Conference actually postponed voting on this affiliation for two years, in order to pursue further study and to pacify those, like Keefer Sr., who feared such ecumenical relationships. See *General Conference Minutes*, 1948, 31; *General Conference Minutes*, 1949, 30-32.

more aggressive and alive” regarding the holiness message, but might also stimulate the Brethren in Christ toward “a more gracious conception of the doctrine of holiness” and give them “a larger influence” within the holiness movement.⁶⁵ Such rationales suggest that in joining this and other ecumenical groups, the Brethren in Christ sought to enlarge their prominence within the Protestant marketplace and perhaps even develop a conception of holiness more in keeping with their upwardly mobile socio-economic status and their growing sense of participation in American culture.

After joining NHA, Brethren in Christ ministers and bishops began to hold key leadership roles and make many contributions to the agency. For instance, in 1968, at the height of domestic tensions over the Vietnam War and the rise of Black Power movements, the Brethren in Christ bishop Arthur Climenhaga helped to prepare a “widely acclaimed” report by the NHA’s Social Action Commission that laid out a holiness response to the issues of the day.⁶⁶ Five years later, in 1973, the Brethren in Christ’s Commission on Peace and Social Concerns co-sponsored with the CHA a seminar on “Christian Holiness and Issues of War and Peace.” Four Brethren in Christ gave papers at the gathering, alongside scholars and leaders from the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of God (Anderson), and the Free Methodist Church, among others. Proceedings from the conference were subsequently collected under the title *Perfect Love and War* and published by the Brethren in Christ’s Evangel Press.⁶⁷ Moreover, from 1972-1974, the Pennsylvania bishop Henry Ginder served as the organization’s president—the first Brethren in Christ to do so.⁶⁸ And in 1977, for his presidential contributions and more, the CHA named Ginder their “Holiness Exponent of the Year.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *General Conference Minutes*, 1948, 30.

⁶⁶ *General Conference Minutes*, 1968, 38.

⁶⁷ The seminar was held in June 1973 in Winona Lake, Indiana. Brethren in Christ presenters included Owen H. Alderfer, C. O. Wittlinger, Daniel Chamberlain, and Lucille Sider Dayton. See Paul Hostetler, ed., *Perfect Love and War: A Dialogue on Christian Holiness and the Issues of War and Peace* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Press, 1974). For a report on the event see John K. Stoner, “Foreword,” in *Perfect Love and War*, 3-4.

⁶⁸ *General Conference Minutes*, 1972, 38; E. Morris Sider, *Leaders Among Brethren: Biographies of Henry A. Ginder and Charlie B. Byers* (Nappanee, IN.: Evangel Press, 1987), 133-134.

⁶⁹ For more on Ginder’s award, see materials in the Henry A. Ginder Papers, MG 12—Box 2.3, Folder “Holiness Exponent of the Year Citation, 1977 CHA Convention, Denver, Colorado,” Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Mechanicsburg, PA).

Yet beyond these elite investments, the Brethren in Christ Church as a whole generally demonstrated broad ambivalence toward the institutional holiness movement. Only a handful of Brethren in Christ ministers ever attended a national convention. Reports by the denomination's representative frequently included calls for more Brethren in Christ ministers to attend and/or give greater financial support to the organization.⁷⁰ Many of those same reports made repeated attempts to emphasize—and perhaps over-emphasize—Brethren in Christ contributions to the organization.⁷¹ But even such reporting did little to bolster denomination-wide support for the church's involvement.

Thus, while membership in the National/Christian Holiness Association managed to galvanize a small section of the Brethren in Christ pastorate and bishopric, that influence seems not to have trickled down to the pew. In the final tally, the boosters who endorsed NHA membership in the late 1940s were wrong: participation in the interdenominational holiness movement did little to inspire greater interest in and enthusiasm for the holiness message. Instead, in the decades after the 1937 General Conference's new doctrinal statement on sanctification, second-work theology seemed far less triumphant, less stable, and less universally embraced. Despite the growth of Brethren in Christ holiness institutions and the increased visibility of Brethren in Christ leaders within the holiness movement, the church as a whole entered into the latter decades of the twentieth century with a weakening commitment to the doctrine of second-work sanctification.

⁷⁰ *General Conference Minutes*, 1960, 48; *General Conference Minutes*, 1961, 47; *General Conference Minutes*, 1962, 45; *General Conference Minutes*, 1963, 53.

⁷¹ For instance, in 1961, the Pennsylvania minister Charlie Byers highlighted the Brethren in Christ contributions to the NHA convention in language uncommon to the typically pride-averse church. He described a seminar led by the Pennsylvania minister Henry Ginder as "one of the better attended seminars" and "a most commendable piece of work," and likewise commended Ginder's talk to the delegate body as "one of the warmest sermon periods of the convention." He also depicted the exhibit hall display by Evangel Press, the Brethren in Christ publishing house, as "attractive," strategically located, and well trafficked. Such puffed-up language may have struck some Brethren in Christ readers as dangerously prideful. Yet repeated mentions of the church's "significant contribution" to the organization continued for multiple years. See Charlie Byers, "Article XXI: Report from the Representative to the National Holiness Convention," *General Conference Minutes*, 1961, 47; *General Conference Minutes*, 1963, 53; and *General Conference Minutes*, 1964, 51.

From second work to secondary status

By the 1980s and 1990s, denominational leaders began to acknowledge that disagreement, confusion, and even disregard for the doctrine of sanctification had emerged in some corners of the church. In 1983, in an effort to remedy these divisions and to renew theological reflection on the topic, the church convened a “Colloquy on the Holy Spirit and the Holy Life.” Leaders declared that the event was not designed “to defend and support Wesleyanism—or any other specific position” but rather “to discover where the Brethren [in Christ] are and to ascertain where we ought to be and want to be.”⁷² At least some of the presenters took this rationale to heart, arguing for a revision of some elements of the church’s historic position.

Luke Keefer Jr.’s contribution to the conference is emblematic in this regard. By the 1980s, Keefer had earned a PhD in religious studies from Temple University in Philadelphia and taken a position at Messiah College, the denominational school in Pennsylvania. His dissertation, on ecclesiology in the writings of John Wesley, had earned him a reputation in both the wider academic community and in the Brethren in Christ Church as an expert on holiness. Church leaders acknowledged this expertise by making him a key presenter at their 1983 conference.⁷³ He began his presentation by affirming the biblical nature of holiness, God’s provision for it, and its necessity in the life of the believer. Yet he also departed from Brethren in Christ orthodoxy by questioning the timing of sanctification as a second work. “An experience of the Spirit does not itself make one a mature Christian,” Keefer told the colloquy delegates. “But as one matures in the faith, his understanding of and experience with the Spirit will enlarge I do not see the Scriptures absolutely defining the timing of these events nor the precise number of them.” In other words, Keefer urged the church not to promote “one-size-fits-all” sanctification experiences. Rather, he recommended a focus on the fruits of sanctification: achieving victory over sin, committing fully to God and the work of God’s kingdom, and knowing and feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴

⁷² Alderfer, “Rationale,” 143.

⁷³ On Keefer’s scholarship on the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, see Manzullo-Thomas, “Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer,” 302-305.

⁷⁴ Luke L. Keefer Jr., “Getting at Essential Issues in Sanctification,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 6, no. 2 (December 1983), 168-209 (quotation, 208).

Keefer's middle-way approach was crucial in several ways. But perhaps its most important contribution to the church was that it formed the basis for the sanctification article in a new doctrinal statement produced by the Brethren in Christ in the early 1990s. The revised article emphasized sanctification as both "a full surrender and commitment of the motives and will to Christ" and "an ongoing journey of yielding to God and growing in grace"—both a decisive crisis experience, and a continuing pursuit of obedience and righteousness.

This re-envisioning of sanctification as a "crisis within a process" moved away from the position of the 1937 statement and reinforced the modest moderation of the 1961 statement, but only slightly. Since the Brethren in Christ had never officially used the language "second work of grace," the new language did not fundamentally represent a change in direction, at least on paper. Leaders suggested that the change epitomized an attempt not to change the church's stance, but to update its framing for "the current generation."⁷⁵ In the 1980s, one senior churchman applauded these efforts and expressed gratitude for a new batch of holiness exponents "who teach holiness, but not in extremes."⁷⁶ Those who had downplayed the radical edges of the doctrine during the church's mid-century acculturation warmly welcomed this effort to refashion sanctification.

But these intentional efforts to renew holiness theology among the Brethren in Christ largely floundered. Demographic data collected from church members over the next three decades indicated widespread ambivalence about the doctrine. According to surveys conducted in 1989, 2006, and 2014, few Brethren in Christ saw or currently see "Wesleyan" as a meaningful marker of their religious identity; most respondents identified themselves as either evangelicals or Anabaptists.⁷⁷ Moreover, and perhaps

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Lynn Thrush, "The Brethren in Christ and Their Doctrinal Statements," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 1987, 11-13.

⁷⁶ "E. J. Swalm Comments on Changes in the Brethren in Christ Church," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 1988, 12.

⁷⁷ John R. Yeatts and Ronald J. Burwell, "The Brethren in Christ at A.D. 2000," in *Reflections on a Heritage: Defining the Brethren in Christ*, ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1999), 238; "Brethren in Christ Member Profile 2006," Section B, question 21, Records of the Brethren in Christ Church, I—14: "Miscellaneous"—Box 1.2, Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Mechanicsburg, PA); Ronald Burwell, "Results of the 2014 Global Anabaptist Profile: Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S.," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 38, no. 3 (December 2015): 370.

most damningly, both the 2006 and 2014 surveys revealed that “maintaining the holy lifestyle” ranked very low on the list of “important issues facing Brethren in Christ congregations today.”⁷⁸

Although many Brethren in Christ seemed ambivalent about the doctrine, others lamented the church’s perceived disregard for it. In 1985, for instance, members of the Big Valley congregation—a church built on its founders’ sanctification experiences—mournfully wrote in the *Evangelical Visitor* that holiness “is not taught in the Brethren in Christ churches as it once was.”⁷⁹ Four years later, an anonymous contributor to the church periodical bemoaned the infrequency of holiness preaching in Brethren in Christ churches. “Where is the word of cleansing from sin and victory over sin?” the author asked. “Are we forgetting the urgency of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Galatians saying, ‘I am crucified with Christ,’ or in his urging the Ephesians to ‘be filled with the Spirit?’”⁸⁰ The boldest critique came from the leadership of Camp Freedom, the Brethren in Christ camp meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida. In 1996, the camp’s board of directors published a Holiness Primer intended, at least in part, to rekindle the doctrine within the Brethren in Christ Church. The Primer’s author complained, “There is a dearth of holiness preaching and teaching . . . not just in other churches but in our church. It is as if holiness were not in the Bible, as if it were of no importance, as if it were an unattainable state of grace.”⁸¹ Written in the same year that Luke Keefer Jr. noted the erosion of the church’s commitment to a Wesleyan theology of sanctification in his keynote at the Center for Brethren in Christ Studies conference, Camp Freedom’s critique showed that not all vestiges of holiness thinking had disappeared from the North American church. Yet at the same time, their manifesto pointed to holiness’s marginal status within the denomination. By the waning years of the twentieth century, the Camp Freedom participants still willing to remain within the Brethren in Christ Church were but a voice calling out in the wilderness.

⁷⁸ Burwell, “2014 Global Anabaptist Profile,” 351-353. In 2006, it was ranked sixth on a list of ten issues; by 2014, it had fallen to spot number eight on the same ten-issue list.

⁷⁹ Mildred Yoder and Sara Bowel, “Considering Sanctification—1985,” *Evangelical Visitor*, August 1985, 24.

⁸⁰ “Onesimus,” *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1989, 29.

⁸¹ Fred Holland, comp., *A Holiness Primer* ([St. Petersburg, FL: Camp Freedom], 1996), 63-64.

Conclusion

By the closing years of the twentieth century, a distinctively Wesleyan-holiness view on sanctification had moved to the margins of the Brethren in Christ Church. A 70-year period of transition had reduced sanctification from a “second work of grace” to a matter of secondary status within much of the denomination. At present, the doctrinal statement of the Brethren in Christ Church affirms the necessity of sanctification, though not firmly as an instantaneous event subsequent to regeneration. Yet at the level of popular opinion and practice, evidence suggests that few Brethren in Christ claim the experience or see it as an important issue in their congregations. As Luke L. Keefer Jr. pointed out over 20 years ago, the Brethren in Christ’s “Wesleyan voice on sanctification” has been clearly diminished.

In light of this history, how should the Brethren in Christ move forward? As an historian, I specialize in interpreting the past and not in predicting the future; I cannot and should not prognosticate on how the Brethren in Christ will preach, teach, and practice its doctrine of holiness in the coming years and decades. Moreover, I am not a Bible scholar nor a theologian, and therefore I do not presume to have answers to weighty questions of religious doctrine or practice. Indeed, I urge the ministers and theologians among us to take up this question using the tools of their own disciplinary traditions and to write their own articles for the church; I expect that the editor of *Brethren in Christ History and Life* would be interested in publishing such works in future issues.

Having made these caveats, however, I want to conclude with a few considerations for how the Brethren in Christ might address its holiness heritage today. First, it seems to me that the desire among Brethren in Christ to live holy lives remains strong. As evidenced by the responses to both the 2006 and 2014 church member demographic studies, moral uprightness remains an important teaching in many Brethren in Christ churches and a necessary and achievable goal among its membership. Brethren in Christ people want to live holy lives. In this sense, our community represents fertile soil for the renewal of a distinctively Wesleyan-holiness vision of sanctification. Our preaching and teaching ministries should tend this fertile soil carefully yet vigorously. We should recommit ourselves at the highest levels—starting with the Leadership Council and the General Conference Board, and

continuing through every regional conference—to the importance of holy living and the availability of God’s resources for such lifestyles. We should invest new energy in and for institutions such as Roxbury Holiness Camp. We should emphasize the doctrine of sanctification in regional conference and General Assembly gatherings, and use other denominational venues—including the annual Impact Seminars—to articulate a vision for what holiness might mean and look like in the twenty-first century.

Second, even as we till the fertile soil of our denominational community to stir a renewed vision for holiness in the Christian life, we need to re-think our language and how it communicates to a contemporary audience. Unfortunately, the terms “holy” and “holiness” have become associated in many minds—especially the minds of millennial and Generation Z Christians—with concepts not intended by our holiness theology. The time has come to revitalize the concept of holiness, in all of its biblical richness, with words not marred by generations of inaccurate connotation or unnecessary burden.⁸² For instance, some people see the terms “holy” and “holiness” as synonymous with “perfection” or “sinlessness,” and they balk at such associations. My own experience teaching young Christians at Messiah College illustrates this problem. When I bring up the concept of biblical holiness in my course on the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, students resist the notion that believers can live lives free from the temptation to sin intentionally. Their hesitancy is born of their preference, rooted in a moderate Calvinism that permeates contemporary evangelicalism, to think of themselves first and foremost as “sinners saved by grace.” If they are sinners first, then they cannot be holy too—because they have inaccurately assumed that to be holy is to be perfectly sinless in behavior. Undoubtedly some of our own people share these concerns, even though they clash with our stated doctrine. We need new language to win over such skeptics. We need language that reminds them that our fundamental identity as Christians is not just “sinners saved by grace” but also—and more importantly—“new

⁸² My notion of the need to revitalize the language of holiness in an increasingly skeptical culture is shaped by my engagement with Jonathan Merritt, *Learning to Speak God From Scratch: Why Sacred Words are Vanishing—and How We Can Revive Them* (New York: Convergent Books, 2018). Merritt argues that in the United States’ twenty-first-century “post-Christian” culture, much of the rich language of Christian spirituality has lost its meaning and stands in desperate—but achievable—need of regeneration.

creations” in Christ.⁸³ We need language that does not equate “holy” with “perfect” but rather with the life-long pursuit of Christ-likeness that liberates us from the desire to rebel intentionally from God’s ways. This teaching has long been standard in Brethren in Christ doctrine, and we need better language to communicate it to believers inside and outside the church today.

Moreover, we need language that liberates the biblical notions of “holy” and “holiness” from their association with being “holier than thou.” Too many people today—both non-Christians and Christians, including, I would guess, some Brethren in Christ—already associate the church with this phrase, or with the related concepts of judgmentalism or hypocrisy.⁸⁴ There is much truth in these associations; the history of American Christianity (and of Christianity in general) is littered with the cautionary tales of believers who failed to live up to God’s standards, of people who lived hateful, greedy, undisciplined lives and whose actions resulted in corruption, violence, racism, sexism, imperialism, and more. Nonetheless, we should not abandon the concepts embedded within the terms “holy” and “holiness.” We need language that reorients the notion of “holy” and “holiness” to its original biblical meaning: not “set apart” in the sense of being superior to or better than others, but rather being set apart in terms of our orientation, our worldview, our way of life. As the theologian and biblical scholar John Oswalt has claimed, the “biblical doctrine of holiness” is “a way of behaving . . . determined by the character of God . . . [that] all Christians are expected to manifest.”⁸⁵ It is a way of being that determines every other action we take in life. It does not make us “holier than thou”; it makes us radically conformed to God’s will. Our language about holiness

⁸³ On this aspect of the Brethren in Christ “accent” on sanctification and holy living, see John E. Zercher, “The Brethren in Christ Accent,” in *Reflections on a Heritage*, 11. Zercher’s observation captures what we say in our *Articles of Faith and Doctrine*: that people who “come to faith in Christ” become “new creatures in Christ, regenerated by the Holy Spirit” and are “acquitted of all guilt for sin.” See “Articles of Faith and Doctrine,” 12.

⁸⁴ On “judgmental” and “hypocritical” as terms that many non-Christians associate with Christianity, see David Kinnamon, and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 28-30, 41-66, 181-204.

⁸⁵ John N. Oswalt, *Called to be Holy: A Biblical Perspective* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 2. Oswalt’s book offers an exegetical reading of both the Old and New Testaments to show that this simple summary fully captures what the Bible teaches on holiness.

should reflect this truth; if the words we use no longer communicate such meaning within our community and outside of it, we need new words.

Importantly, we Brethren in Christ have a heritage that empowers us for this work. When some came to see the Brethren in Christ of the 1930s and 1940s as “holier than thou,” we adjusted our communal practices and membership standards in the 1950s and 1960s to renew and revitalize our church. We need to take similar steps in our present moment regarding our way of communicating holiness. Only as we engage and employ new language to best communicate these timeless biblical concepts in our contemporary context will we see holiness theology revitalized in our own midst.

Third, while pursuing new language to communicate the content of our holiness theology, we also need to recognize that our cultural, political, and religious context differs considerably from the context in which our Brethren in Christ ancestors articulated and developed their understanding of holy living. During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Brethren in Christ possessed theological clarity about what fell under this rubric. Virtues such as humility, truthfulness, and sincerity were embodied in practices such as plain dress and thereby signaled purity of heart and triumph over sin, while vices such as swearing, lying, gambling, dancing, drinking alcohol, watching movies, and more signaled worldliness. Some of the past clarity on these issues has disappeared; plain dress, for instance, is no longer considered a signal of one’s spiritual condition, and fewer church members see dancing, watching movies, or even drinking alcohol as absolute evils.⁸⁶ Moreover, issues to which past generations of Brethren in Christ gave little attention are of significant concern to today’s Christians: Racism, sexism, economic oppression, immigration, climate change, and more now galvanize the hearts and hands of many believers, including many Brethren in Christ.⁸⁷ In other words, we Brethren in Christ ought to give careful consideration to expanding what behaviors, habits, and moral

⁸⁶ On Brethren in Christ views of these matters today, see Question 11, “Section F: Faith and Social Issues,” *2006 Church Member Profile*, and Burwell, “2014 Global Anabaptist Profile,” 368.

⁸⁷ To this point, see the articles in *In Part*, Spring/Summer 2015.

issues we include under the rubric of “holy living.” We should emphasize not only personal sins—the kinds of issues that so concerned our spiritual forefathers and -mothers in their contexts—but also the corporate sins and systemic evils that concern this generation of evangelicals.

Much more should and could be said about the potential for and path toward the renewal of holiness among the Brethren in Christ, and I hope this essay sparks a conversation among our denominational leaders, pastors, and laypeople. Yet in order to chart our future, we must begin with our past. Understanding where we have been as a denomination will help us to move forward together. Only when we comprehend how the Brethren in Christ turned sanctification from a second work to a matter of secondary status will we be able to reverse this trajectory in the twenty-first century.