

# CULTURAL CONCERNS— VALUES, PROCESSES, IDENTITIES

John Byl  
Redeemer College

## ***Calvinists and Mennonites: A Pilot Study on Shepherding Christianity and Sport in Canada***

The purpose of this paper is to examine Canadian churches' understandings of sport, physical health, physical education, recreation and dance. This is not something that has been researched in any comprehensive way. As a preliminary study, I have selected two journals, the *Christian Courier* (CC), serving the Calvinist community and the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (MBH), serving the Mennonite Brethren denomination. This paper is the first of several that will deal with the way in which these issues are presented in different church periodicals.

The roots of the CC lie in the *Canadian Calvinist* (1945-1950) and the *Contact* (August 1949-October 1950). These two journals amalgamated in October 1945 to become the *Calvinist Contact* which served the Dutch-Calvinistic immigrant community of Canada. The journal switched its name to *Christian Courier* in 1992 to attract a broader audience. It reached its peak in the late 1970s. The MBH began in 1962 and like the CC it also served a young immigrant community.

The CC community crossed the ocean from the Netherlands to the promised land, Canada. Canada was a country with valued outdoor recreational opportunities in which Sunday was a quiet refuge from the 'busyness' of the work week. When Sunday sport was legalized in Ontario in 1961, that refuge was gone. The CC community also became more prosperous and took up sports such as ice hockey and golf, began watching professional sport, enjoyed more extensive holidays and took up social dancing. CC writers tried to encourage participation that was faithful to God. This meant playing with skill, enjoyment, fun and love. Exercise was valued, as was rest, eating well, developing skills, experiencing a sense of community, and all the while caring for the earth. Lack of faithful participation was evidenced through recklessness, violence, cursing, vengefulness, taxing or polluting the earth's resources, and sexual lust.

The *MBH* community came from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Mennonites were pacifists and had a strong sense of separation from the world and evil, non-godly people. They saw sport and recreation as innately wholesome activities that offered tremendous evangelistic opportunities. This emphasis on witnessing permeated almost every article on these topics. The *MBH* writers encouraged honoring God through sport and recreation. This meant taking care of the body, playing with grace and skill, and teamwork. Dishonoring God included resorting to violence, one-upmanship, and territorialism. They also opposed the competitive pursuit of victory, self-indulgence, profanity, immorality, professionalism, seeking temporary earthly fame, idolatry, spectatorship, and missing too many church services.

Both communities have become more assimilated into Canadian culture and as they have done so they have become more involved in sport and recreation. They also appear to have grown closer together in their views on the connections between sport, recreation, and their religious beliefs.