



Introduction

Allow me a few rather personal remarks at the outset. In order to correspond more closely with my earlier research on Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren, I have taken the liberty to add the word "Canadian" to the originally assigned topic and have thereby narrowed the focus of my discussion. Such greater specificity of the unit of analysis should only strengthen my argument, because it allows for closer documentation.

Let me add further, by way of personal commentary, I almost feel that I am re-living that unnerving experience of defending my dissertation almost nine years ago, albeit without the anxiety that obviously accompanies such a testing of one's research among that university elite. But there's a difference. Whereas this friendly audience may not have the power to exclude me from some academic reward, it has its own "power of the gate." Your interest in today's subject is not a matter of academic necessity by virtue of your vocation, but is intrinsically motivated by your own authentic interest in the subject and, I dare say, expertise in the same. In a sense, I am all the more on trial, but I cherish this opportunity to have you test my findings, and I do not really feel intimidated. In fact, I wish to thank you for your participation in this experience.

Further, by way of introduction, I need to clarify a few matters about my approach and how it is to be distinguished from several similar studies. First, how does my presentation today differ from my own dissertation of a decade ago, other than in length? While the length indeed differs, the thesis remains the same. It is interesting to note how a single notion, inspired by one of my professors, developed into a 600-page dissertation. When later I was encouraged to publish the dissertation, I was asked to shorten the manuscript by about 50 per cent and cut out all the "archival stuff." For this occasion, I have once again radically reduced the length, not to a few sentences, where the idea started, but at least to a manageable half-hour presentation. That is an interesting pilgrimage of expansion and contraction for a single notion to undergo. While this rethinking and restating of my thesis after almost a decade of distancing has led to a few second thoughts, it has not caused me to abandon the thesis itself. Lest you feel I am too readily complacent with what I earlier wrote, let me assure you that there is enough there about which I still need to be modest.

How does this study, further, differ from that done by J.B. Toews, Abe Konrad, and Al Dueck, published as "Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile, 1972-1982" in Direction just one year ago? Both studies, theirs and mine, are based in part on the Church Member Profile of Kauffman and Harder in 1972. Both are concerned with

Mennonite Brethren, and both deal with continuity and change. Yet, the differences are substantial. The unit of analysis of my study was Canadian Mennonite Brethren; theirs was North American Mennonite Brethren, both Canadian and American. The time framework for my study is one-half century, 1925 to 1975; theirs was one decade, 1972-1982. The data used for my study were gleaned from conference yearbooks, periodicals, sermons, and other historical documentation, in addition to the Church Member Profile of 1972; theirs includes two similar profiles separated by ten years. The purpose of my study was to test a theory of sectarian viability; theirs was to test the degree of change in faith and practice with the explicit purpose to alert the denomination to a demise in religious commitment. Finally, my study was an exercise in the sociology of religion, that is, to further the theoretical study of religious forces shaping society and society shaping the form of religion; theirs was an exercise in religious sociology, where sociological data are used to further a religious end. And so our studies, despite some similarities, have some fundamental differences.

Further, by way of introduction, I need to explain my use of the term "sect," since I treat the Canadian Mennonite Brethren as a sectarian movement. I am quite aware, particularly in the European setting, of the pejorative connotations of the term. In its popular, non-sociological meaning, it has overtones of esoteric religious beliefs accompanied by a querulous attitude of intolerance. In fact, Webster's dictionary refers to a sectarian as a "narrow or bigoted person." Little wonder that adherents of smaller, Christian denominations resent the application of this derisive term to themselves. Why then use it? I am using the term "sect" in a non-pejorative sense to describe a movement of religious protest against the social order, be it state, institution or society, or an established religious organization, a protest which results in voluntary separation from such an environment to demonstrate the dissonance between what the group perceives as normative in matters of faith and practice and what it experiences as dominant in the social order. I am using the term, primarily, because of the heuristic purpose it serves in a sociological analysis. Max Weber, one of the fathers of the discipline of sociology of religion, first used the term, and it was employed by church historian, Ernst Troeltsch, in his church-sect typology. I am familiar with that rather vast body of literature that has used, expanded, critiqued, refined, rejected, and eventually re-employed the church-sect typology. Naturally, I would have preferred the distinction of "institutional" versus "voluntary" church, which possibility Troeltsch considered, but, simply put, I have chosen to use this simple, well-worn typology, because it serves as a convenient tool to analyze continuity and change and helps explain the dialectic which makes the Mennonite Brethren movement viable. And now to the argument itself.

I. An Explanation of Sectarian Persistence

Despite those social analysts who predict religion's imminent demise, religion in fact persists, and the sectarian forms of religion seem to prosper in this post-Christian era of the "world come of age." Among the sectarian movements, Mennonite Brethren thrive in the face of the erosive forces that would normally take their toll on a movement. How can such survival strength be explained? Is it sufficient simply to hold that if you adhere to the truth, then truth will prevail, or if you employ the appropriate strategies of recruitment, then the movement will prosper? In other words, can the theologians and missiologists provide the needed explanations, or might there be a sociological explanation as well? This study proffers a sociological explanation for sectarian persistence.

The integration/differentiation dialectic. At the heart of my own explanation of sectarian persistence is the integration/differentiation dialectic used by my mentor, Dr. Hans Mol, developed in his Identity and the Sacred (Agincourt: Book Society of Canada, 1976). He identifies those forces that integrate or sacralize a religious movement and thereby hold it together. He also identifies those forces which differentiate and disintegrate or have an erosive effect upon a movement. Becoming overly protective inhibits growth and introverts a movement into the restrictive rigidity of, let us say, a Hutterite colony. Excessive accommodation and adaptability could dissipate a movement until it has lost itself into its host environment. For continuity, the appropriate dialectic between integration and differentiation must take place whereby the interaction of these forces avoids overly restrictive rigidity and excessive adaptability. This dialectic provides a clue to the viability of any religious movement.

Isolating sacralization/secularization variables. How can one then isolate those variables of integration, which we will term mechanisms or dimensions of sacralization, and those variables of differentiation or secularization which tend to erode a movement? Mol speaks of four mechanisms of sacralization--objectification (to have a transcendental point of reference), commitment (an emotional attachment to a specific focus), ritual (which reiterates meaning and reinforces identity), and myths (a theology which interprets reality). By the same token, other sociologists find similar mechanisms. Orrin Klapp found six criteria in his study of cults; Rosabeth Kanter identified six major commitment mechanisms in her study of communes and utopias; and Charles Glock singled out five major dimensions of religiosity: the experiential (religious emotion), the ideological (beliefs), the ritualistic (religious practices), the intellectual (information on faith tenets and Scriptures) and consequential dimension (the effects seen in action). With the help of all of the above, I chose five, identified below, which I felt best described Mennonite Brethren. To identify variables of secularization, I chose not simply the countervailing forces of conflict which resist the sacralizing mechanisms (which become part of the dialectic within sacralization), but looked

for a new cluster of independent variables. These are education, urbanization, occupational change, economic ascendancy, and cultural assimilation.

Summarizing my hypothesis. Sectarian religiosity is a viable alternative among contemporary religious movements, since it provides the dynamic force and the structural form for a movement of religious dissent in its protest against "the world" or society at large, including the religious establishment. More specifically, my study postulates the following:

1. The synthetic process of sacralization accounts for the continuity of sectarianism in that it delineates boundaries, enhances cohesion, consolidates identities, facilitates socialization, and reinforces structural integration.
2. The analytic process of secularization accounts for change in sectarianism in that it is open to the relativizing impact of education, the fragility hazards of urbanization, the reorientation accompanying occupational change, the upward mobility resulting from economic ascendancy, and the identity crisis concomitant to assimilation.
3. The interaction of these processes is necessary to avoid rigidification in an excessively defensive stance and to avoid total accommodation to its environment, such dialectic furnishing the ongoing balance which is the outcome of tension between sect and society.
4. The Canadian Mennonite Brethren Church is an example of such a viable sectarian movement, and it may well be the pattern for other evangelical denominations or movements of religious dissent.

II. Factors Contributing to the Continuity of Canadian Mennonite Brethren

If indeed a central hypothesis of this study is that the synthetic process of sacralization contributes to the continuity of sectarianism, then one needs to isolate those measurable components of continuity, assess the degree to which they in fact contribute to the sacralization process, and further note the inherently countervailing forces of secularization to ascertain whether the cumulative impact of these sacralizing forces is in fact contributing to the continuity of the movement. Since my intent is more than simply provide empirical data, I shall not bore you with extensive documentation. Instead, for this purpose, I shall attempt to interpret reasons for the data, rather than supply extensive data. These data are available in the dissertation and published manuscript.

1. Delineating Boundaries (Beliefs and Ethics)

A social group becomes a group through its associations with individuals and disassociation from the rest of society. Canadian Mennonite Brethren have successfully confronted change and disassociated themselves from society by consciously delineating boundaries with their beliefs and ethics. A belief system provides the sectarian group with an Archimedean point which anchors the movement and provides

a leverage for its encounter with a hostile environment. The high measure of orthodoxy (mostly in the upper 90 percentile), evangelicalism (again high response, except for literal creationist view), and Anabaptism (somewhat lower rating) suggest strong boundaries of belief. A closer look at Mennonite Brethren through the fifty years prior to 1975 suggest at least four contributing factors to account for such tenacity of beliefs. First, Canadian MBs were known for restorationist thinking, since they continued to look back at the pattern of Menno and the first-century church. Secondly, the church demonstrated a rigorously biblicist position, repeatedly appealing to the Scriptures for its final authority, not through arbitrary proof-texting but through diligent study and application. Thirdly, known for voluntarism, church members are such who consciously experienced Christ and voluntarily submitted themselves to the norm of the group. Fourthly, MBs have been intentionally separatistic, seeing themselves in constant conflict with society which is non-Christian, not simply withdrawing from society, but confronting the societal value-system in terms of their own value-system. Canadian MBs have successfully delineated cognitive boundaries through their belief system.

Mennonite Brethren particularly have also been known for their prescriptions and proscriptions. In personal, moral issues (according to the 1972 Church Member Profile), MBs hold a rather conservative position, similar to the Mennonite Church, but significantly more restrictive than the General Conference Mennonites. In social ethics, MBs are more lenient than other Mennonite groups, except for capital punishment. Instances of ethical decision-making show that MBs refuse to change in some issues, such as smoking; change their stance in some issues, such as owning and selling television; partially comply to one of the distinctives of the faith, as in nonresistance; and indicate an openness in such a matter as capital punishment. In order to teach and enforce an ethical position, MBs engage in one or more of the following: systematic instruction, exemplary leadership, reaching consensus, behavioral requirements, and the exercise of discipline. It would appear that by delineating cognitive and normative boundaries, Canadian Mennonite Brethren have successfully facilitated the persistence of sectarianism. Indeed, it would appear that the reports of God's demise have been grossly exaggerated.

2. Enhancing Cohesion (Family Solidarity and Ethnicity)

The cohesiveness which contributes to sectarian persistence is particularly evident in the family solidarity and, until recently, the ethnicity of Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Because of their biblical understanding of the family, Mennonite Brethren emphasize the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. Empirical evidence supports this view and practice of marriage and the family. Marriages are largely endogamous, and few separations and divorces occur. At the same time, the common

practice of grace before meals and family worship, and the firm belief that pre-marital and extra-marital sex are always wrong, indicate such solidarity, as does the fact that almost all Mennonite Brethren families own their home. The sociological function of the family serves to act as a shock-breaker to the first and second generation immigrants and to withstand the encounter with the secular world for the third and fourth generations. The threat of family erosion has increasingly been perceived by its church leaders, and rigorous attempts have been made to promote family solidarity both on a Conference level, through study sessions and official pronouncements, as well as at the family level by encouraging social functions which tie families together, deliberately structuring local church events to focus on the family, and bringing appropriate literature into the home.

Despite obvious change in the degree of ethnicity and the increased self-criticism which it engendered, ethnicity nonetheless prevails, if not conspicuously, then in rather subtle factors. The large percentage of foreign births and the continuous use, until recently, of the German language have been strong factors in the pertinacious hold of ethnicity. Not so obvious are factors of religious belief and participation, endogamous practices, parochial education and organizations, and the communalism apparent in the choice of friends. Yet, intimations of ethnicity continue to characterize Canadian Mennonite Brethren. The cohesive force of such ethnicity becomes apparent when one notes the common experiences accompanying successive waves of Mennonite immigration, when one appreciates how the collective responsibility of the Reiseschuld forged a common community, when one senses the emotional and associational bonds of a common Muttersprache, or when one rehearses through commemorative occasions those events which have become part of an ethnic heritage.

The cohesive impact of family bonds and peoplehood have undoubtedly facilitated the sacralization of the Mennonite Brethren identity and to that degree contributed to the persistence of sectarianism.

3. Consolidating Identities (Conversion and Charisma)

For a religious movement to persist, identities will need to be consolidated both on a personal and social level. In this sense, conversion is to the individual identity what charisma is to the group--both mechanisms leading to identity formation. Canadian Mennonite Brethren consider conversion and personal evangelism among their continuing distinctives. Empirical evidence confirms not only theoretical belief in, but actual experience of, such conversion, the most frequent occasion being the public church meeting or a personal invitation. Measures of growth in spiritual life through sanctification and devotionism, according to the Church Member Profile, likewise rank the Mennonite Brethren slightly above other Mennonite groups. Less prominent, although still in excess of other Mennonites measured, is their involve-

ment in personal evangelism. To account for such continued vitality, one must note the place of conversion in the Mennonite Brethren church membership requirement, in theology, and in preaching, despite the practical inconsistency of using essentially an adult conversion model, designed for out-group members, and applying it to children of believers. The resulting neglect in nurture is partly compensated for by emphasizing the cultivation of devotional, pious habits. Inhibitions about sharing their Christian experience, on account of the ethnicity of the first and second generation immigrants, have largely been overcome by the present generation, although loss of religious vitality through routinization of charisma still hampers the witness. To overcome such formalism, revivalism is encouraged and sporadically occurs in local churches and communities and almost routinely in Christian high schools. Conversion and its correlatives continue to be most meaningful means of consolidating a fragile identity on a personal level.

On a group level, that is, on a national denominational level, it is charisma which achieves such consolidation of identity. Weber's view that those subject to authority must validate charisma by recognizing it has been shown to be the case among Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Empirical data from the Church Member Profile indicate that there is in excess of fifty percent congregational involvement in leadership, yet there is a continued demand for ordained, salaried pastors. Women, however, are generally not wanted in positions of leadership. A more intensive analysis of leadership patterns shows two distinct types of leaders from an organizational perspective, congregational and conference, the latter being provincial, national, or General Conference. From the functional perspective one can isolate managerial, proclamatory, and scholarly types. Each level has its own unique charisma. The most obvious problems--the tendency toward elitism, the role of the professional pastor, and the role of women--result from societal change and differentiation which impinge upon the Anabaptist notion of the priesthood of all believers. The resulting emerging pattern is one which honors congregational involvement, professional leadership, increased participation of women, and decentralization of authority. Charisma has enabled the brotherhood notion of leadership to prevail, since those subject to authority--the members--recognize that type of leadership which sacralizes their identity.

4. Facilitating Socialization (Church Participation and Educational Institutions)

Canadian Mennonite Brethren ensure the transmission of their heritage and the retention of their sectarian stance through a deliberate and systematic process of socialization. A major aspect of this socialization is the weekly church participation. Empirical measures of such participation include associationalism, that is, church attendance and a degree of actual involvement, as well as the attitudes which

accompany associationalism. Almost all Canadian Mennonite Brethren (98%) attend church almost every week or once a week or more, and almost one-half (43%) attend a meeting at church on a day other than Sunday. Again, most Canadian Mennonite Brethren (95%) feel they can get some/very much/quite a lot from a typical service, and most (91%) are somewhat interested/interested/strongly interested in assuming some responsibility of service. Further analysis suggests that such participation is meaningful to the believer because it provides occasion for worship. Mennonite Brethren have preserved a rich heritage of hymns which facilitate the worship, stress spontaneous prayer, and particularly center their worship on biblical preaching. The Sunday schools provide the strongest weekly instructional avenue. In addition, ladies societies and youth groups add a dimension of fellowship along with the instruction and worship, while vacation Bible schools, Bible camps, and, more recently, boys and girls clubs have given outreach opportunities along with the socialization. Tensions accompanying such socialization means have resulted from the dialectic between the yen for spontaneity and the bent of routinization, the ease of socialization at a cognitive level and the difficulty of practical application, the penchant for socializing and the passion for socialization, and desire for conservation and the duty of evangelization.

The formal socialization through parochial, educational institutions has become a reality for more than one-half of Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Among the schools, the Christian high schools and Bible schools are most frequently attended, about one-fourth of all Canadian Mennonite Brethren having attended each of these schools. Moreover, not only do most Canadian Mennonite Brethren recommend attending a parochial school beyond high school, but are also prepared to support the same. From the beginning in 1911 Canadian Mennonite Brethren have been concerned with private schools. The Bible schools were begun first, and while twenty-one schools have existed in all, three large Bible schools have reached a degree of stability in program and student enrolment, with an aggregate of some 500 to 600 students. Christian high schools were begun after World War II, and three large schools with more than one thousand students optimistically continue their parochial education. In addition, a Bible college and college of arts, begun in 1944, serves the entire Canadian brotherhood and attracts other denominational groups as well. A graduate seminary, jointly sponsored with the American Mennonite Brethren, is a recent addition to ensure denominational preservation in times of change. Thus, church participation--through worship, teaching, fellowship, and evangelism--and formal instruction--through Bible schools, high schools, college, and seminary--have significantly facilitated the socialization process and thereby contributed to the continuity of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren.

5. Reinforcing Integration (Conference Structures and Convention Assemblies)

When the dynamic force of sectarian religiosity is given structural form, the vitality of the force is not only properly channeled to give persistence to the religious movement, but also more capably harnessed to produce action. Conference structures, thus, help both to retain its old members and to recruit new ones. Implying a covenant relationship among a number of congregations, such conference structures appear on three levels among Canadian Mennonite Brethren, every congregation usually being a member at each of these levels. Most local in nature is the provincial conference in Canada (or district conference in the United States) with its own charter and constitution and its annual or semi-annual sessions. On the Canadian national level is the Canadian Conference (until 1954 referred to as the Northern District Conference). Although separately incorporated with its own charter and constitution since 1945, it has held its annual sessions since 1910. Most all-inclusive is the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America, of which the Canadian churches constitute one equal area conference. First formed in Russia as a Bundeskonferenz in 1872, it organized in the United States in 1879 and soon extended itself to include Canada. At each conference level, specific common tasks unite the action of the participating churches. The polity of these structures emphasizes the autonomy of the local church in matters of local interest, but conference decisions become morally binding upon all churches participating in a given conference, the provincial conferences subject to the Canadian, and the Canadian subordinate to the General Conference. Attending conference sessions has generally been found to be a positive experience--enabling fellowship, fostering brotherhood, giving ear to minority views, facilitating reconciliation, expressing unity, strengthening commitment, and motivating for service. At the same time, relying upon conference structures stifles personal initiative, limits universal representation in decision-making, promotes elitism, and invites bureaucratization.

While the centripetal impact of conference structures helps to retain its members and preserve the movement, the centrifugal impact of conference agencies facilitates recruitment of new members despite the implicit hazards of such a conversionist stance. Canadian Mennonite Brethren have been active in both evangelistic and service-oriented agencies. Evangelism within Canada has expressed itself in many types of outreach--Bible colportage, city missions, tract missions, summer vacation Bible schools and camp ministries, radio programs, home visitations, and evangelistic campaigns. More successful numerically, both in terms of financial and personnel resources employed as well as church membership experienced, is the evangelistic outreach beyond Canada in such countries as India, China, Japan, Zaire, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, Germany, and Austria. Likewise,

involvement in humanitarian service has been prominent both within and beyond Canada. Mutual aid was extended by Mennonites to their own brotherhood both to fellow immigrants within Canada as well as to those settling in Paraguay. Assistance was given to many handicapped and deprived groups outside of their denomination as well. Particularly effective have been the efforts through the Christian service branch of the denominational mission board and through the inter-Mennonite agency of Mennonite Central Committee. The impact of these outreach and service efforts has been integrating, despite the centrifugal tug, because such involvement has legitimated the movement for its adherents, has channeled the momentum of their motivation, and has involuntarily reaffirmed their commitment. Conference structures and service agencies have sacralized the sectarian movement and given it tenacity and vitality in the face of a threatening society into which it is increasingly assimilated.

The foregoing factors have supported the central hypothesis of this study, namely, that the synthetic process of sacralization contributes to the continuity of sectarianism. Canadian Mennonite Brethren have been observed to reinforce and eternalize patterns of religiosity and thereby modify and obstruct or even legitimate change in order to safeguard identity. The sacralizing process is, thus, a response to change, but safeguards the identity of the movement against the dysfunctional and erosive strain of excessive adaptability.

III. Factors Contributing to Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren

The following cluster of factors analyses the components contributing to religious change and tests the hypothesis that these components of change lead to secularization. It would be over-simplifying the processes at work to insist that the factors of sacralization are solely integrative in their effect and the factors of secularization solely disruptive. Admittedly, a complex dialectic is at work, but the factors will test the overall effect of change. For this reason, education is seen as both a synthesizing process of socialization, as above, as well as a relativizing process, as follows.

1. Education and Relativization

Canadian Mennonite Brethren have responded differently to change, secularization, and education. Initial reluctance to change has given way in the last decade to widespread acceptance of, and adjustment to, change. Persistent resistance to secularization has been tempered by tacit approval of certain forms of exposure to the world. Openness to education in order to reap its benefits of upward social mobility has been offset by hesitancy to risk the truly relativizing effects of the same. Cross-tabulations of levels of educational attainment with variables of religiosity indicate that the impact of education was not without ambiguity--sometimes

enhancing religiosity, at other times loosening the web of religious beliefs and ethics. To assess the overall effect of education, it appears to be necessary, then, to distinguish between its impact on change generally and on secularization specifically, as well as to distinguish between the countervailing consequences of each. It is the dialectic of these forces, in the end, that not only provides the movement the tension of the present but also proffers the vitality of the future.

First, there seems to be no question that education effects change. On the one hand, such change brings about conformity, as the emphasis upon socialization intended to show. On the other hand, such change can also release from the sacralizing encrustations of religious conformity and institutionalization. For Canadian Mennonite Brethren, the socialization impact of education, whether through formal training or religious participation, has been prominent throughout the period under study, yet the relativizing effects of education have made their greatest impact on social change within the last decade, as the observations on urbanization, occupational change, economic ascendancy, and assimilation indicate. Change, thus, not only molds and strengthens religious beliefs and thereby fosters continuity of sectarianism, but change also weakens and dislodges set patterns of beliefs and ethics, and hence poses as a threat to continuity.

Next, education has also resulted in a two-fold effect upon secularization. On the one hand, from the outset, Mennonite Brethren have resisted secularization, because to them secularization meant conformity to the world and loss of separatism. Some forms of idealistic separatism still prevail, even among the most educated, as the empirical tests of religiosity indicate. Education has, in fact, increased the practice of religion (in participation and associationalism) and strengthened the Anabaptist beliefs and social ethics among those who are college educated. In this respect, education has arrested the secularization process. On the other hand, education has also had a relativizing effect upon religious beliefs and ethics and, in this sense, has enhanced the secularization process. Education leads to increased differentiation in the symbolic system, that is, a proliferation of perspectives and specialized social structures, which offers man a plurality of viewpoints. This necessitates a tolerance, to view the perspectives with a measure of objectivity, and results in a broadening of outlook. Such relativization, then, loosens the attachment to one's sacralized commitments and sometimes even embraces new perspectives into one's own symbol system. This relativizing effect is apparent in the loss of belief in orthodoxy and personal ethics, as the empirical evidence indicates, and in the concession to view secularization positively in recent times.

In summary then, it is the interplay of these sacralizing and secularizing forces that keeps the religious movement viable. The impact of education illustrates this curious dialectic. Education, at the same time, strengthens religious belief and practice and also loosens or relativizes the fabric. The relativizing or secularizing effect expresses itself not only negatively in a loss of religious belief or a denial of God, but positively as a freeing process to enable man to choose God personally. In this latter sense, secularization supports the Anabaptist notion of voluntarism. Education, thus, simultaneously builds up religious faith and commitment and breaks down taken-for-granted forms of religiosity. It thereby challenges the religious movement to acquire adaptable forms and functions that the changing world demands.

2. Urbanization and Fragility Hazards

Since urbanization has increased the fragility of the religious commitment of Canadian Mennonite Brethren, it becomes apparent that urbanization does contribute to secularization, but it is by no means clear that the urbanization process seriously threatens the continuity of sectarianism, as Gibson Winter would intimate. Why sectarianism still persists becomes evident in a three-fold way.

First, understanding the process of urbanization and its particular occurrence in Mennonite Brethren history helps to explain the persistence of religiosity despite increased threat of erosion in recent times. The heterogeneous structures and dynamic processes implicit to urban residence account for accessibility to change and secularization. The increased freedom to choose and the plurality of life-styles from which to choose results in greater voluntarism and more deliberate commitments. Moreover, the cultural qualities which constitute urbanity are not restricted to urban residence, as the residents of rural nonfarms indicate. Whether one understands secularization negatively, as a loss of religious commitment, or positively, as increased freedom, urbanization has contributed to secularization of Canadian Mennonite Brethren, especially since World War II. For example, from 1951 to 1971 the percentage of urban church membership doubled from 22 to 44 and by 1975 was at least 50. Although urban mentality lags behind urban residence, secularization has, no doubt, posed as a threat to an increasingly fragile religious commitment.

Next, the empirical data further disclose both increased secularization in some religious components and stubborn persistence in other variables. As expected, urbanization correlates positively with one's socio-economic status--the larger cities attract the more educated, the skilled and professional, and those with highest incomes. The correlation with religious variables is less unambiguous. The practice of religion, as measured by devotionism and associationalism, is less rigorous in urban than rural residence. Particularly in general orthodoxy and fundamentalist orthodoxy, it is the resident of the large city and the rural nonfarm whose beliefs

are more relativized. Yet in the Anabaptist belief variable, the city residents are stronger than the rural. In the realm of ethics, it is the personal moral issues which urbanization relativizes, but not so in the social ethics, where urbanization makes no significant differences. Interestingly, the rural farm and small city residents are akin in religious beliefs and practice, even as rural nonfarm resembles more the large city resident. Residence in urban areas, therefore, tends towards secularization but is no guarantee of the same.

Finally, important to understand why sectarianism persists despite the secularizing effects of urbanization is a religious movement's self-conscious response to such urbanization. Initial fears and perceived consequences with physical, psychological, social, and ideological implications were counter-balanced by increasing awareness of an urban frontier which offered new freedoms and increased opportunities. Anxiety gave way to confidence, retreat from dangers was replaced with acceptance of the encounter with new challenges, and fragility hazards were viewed as potential sectarian strengths. Urbanization does indeed enhance secularization, but it also provides a stimulus that can reinforce fragile structures and eroding beliefs. Whether it will produce the evidence which will bear out the more positive assertions of recent Canadian Mennonite Brethren leadership remains a question for the future.

3. Occupational Change and Reorientation

Living in the city and having penetrated society in a wide variety of occupations, Canadian Mennonite Brethren of recent decades resemble more closely their Anabaptist forebears of the sixteenth century than their grandparents earlier this century. Initially there were concerns about urban residence and the pursuit of non-rural vocations. Eventually, however, the occupational shift proved to be more of an asset than a liability for their religious vitality. Secularization in the sense of decline and defection occurred, but more significant was the secularization process which led to a freeing from rurality and a penetration of all segments of society. Secularization in such a positive sense enhanced religious commitment and stimulated sectarian persistence.

The political, economic, and even religious upheavals of the decade prior to the large immigration of the mid-twenties has seemingly loosened the moorings of Mennonite Brethren in rurality. In the 1930's and 1940's it was the depression, new educational opportunities, the beginning of the drift to the cities, climaxed by the upheaval of World War II, which ended the predominantly rural vocations. The decades after the mid-century mark a large-scale shift to other than farming occupations, with teaching as the most prominent choice. Important in their choice of teaching were the economic security, the upward mobility, and the witness opportunity that this profession offered.

Empirical data indicate that, among the employed, the white-collar occupations constitute some 25% of the total membership, the professional and technical workers being the largest single vocational group. Farm owners and farm managers constitute some 13% of the total membership. Service workers, machine operators and laborers make up but 8.5% of the total membership; housewives and students, almost one-half. Cross-tabulations of different occupations with the varying measures of religiosity suggest that the machine operator is the most religious, followed by the housewife and the farmer. Moreover, the business owners and managers are the most secular, followed by sales and clerical workers and then students. It would appear that white-collar occupations are more secularized. Among the white-collar occupations, however, the professionals rated the highest in religiosity (excluding the housewives).

Mennonite Brethren have recognized both the erosive effects as well as the challenge to penetrate society with a Christian witness that such a shift to the non-farming vocations brings. The shift in occupations has resulted in large-scale residential mobility accompanied by defection to other denominations instead of transferring membership to another Mennonite Brethren church. Furthermore, the Puritanical distaste for personal indulgence, characterizing the Mennonite Brethren background, changed to an appreciation for recreation and the arts which the leisure of the new occupations permitted. A wholesale defection and secularization has been arrested through the conscious attempt at socialization of youth to understand the significance of the calling. Not only were the young people fortified for the urban vocations, they were encouraged actively to penetrate a variety of vocations and disperse to diverse geographical locations. The potential defection and disinterest in religion has, thus, been sublimated to sectarian loyalty and missionary energy. Once again, the dialectic of sacralizing and secularizing forces produces a religious vitality that, despite some loss, results in sectarian persistence.

4. Economic Ascendancy and Vertical Mobility

The study of social analysts of the reciprocal relation between economics and religion finds ready application among Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Weber's thesis that religion affects economic behavior found illustration not only among sixteenth-century Anabaptists but also among twentieth-century Mennonite Brethren. Yet, Niebuhr's analysis, however astute, cannot fully be illustrated by Mennonite Brethren, because sectarianism persisted beyond the second generation. Wilson's assertion that some sects can withstand the denominationalizing process and Lenski's findings that one can be socialized to withstand total convergence in attitudes, values and behavior explained the stubborn resistance by Canadian Mennonite Brethren to at least some of the secularizing effects of economic prosperity.

The seeds for such prosperity were implanted by the frontier spirit of early Mennonite settlers, and the beginnings were accelerated by the several waves of immigrants since 1920's. The work ethic has been a most tenacious motivating force, and the tendency to acquire economic assets has further contributed to the affluent state which could have serious secularizing consequences.

Empirical data reveal that the most affluent tend to be residents of cities, have usually received graduate or professional training, and likely belong to professional or business occupations. Despite these marks of material prosperity, the most affluent are not necessarily the least religious. It appears that the economically deprived have higher ratings in devotionism, fundamentalist orthodoxy, and personal, moral issues. The affluent, at the same time, reveal higher responses in associationalism, Anabaptism, and social ethics. Neither group, the least affluent or the most affluent, can be said to be more religious, for each group excels in some of the measures of religiosity.

A further examination of the consequences of such material prosperity over a longer period of time indicates a decided upward social mobility with the usual results of class cleavage, accentuated values on worldly success, and a loss in inner-worldly asceticism. While there may be some mellowing of sectarianism, as such, Mennonite Brethren have not shifted wholly to the right on the sect-church continuum, but the sectarian stance has persisted. This persistence can be explained in two further effects of prosperity--the ability to, and actuality of, using the material resources to promote religious causes, including assistance beyond one's own congregation, and taking the initiative to reform the secularized, economic structures of society. These latter effects not only demonstrate Weber's notion that religion motivates economic activity, but they also suggest that religion has the vitality to overcome the secularizing effects of economic prosperity.

5. Assimilation and Identity Crisis

In the dialectic of sacralization and secularization, assimilation stands out as a most significant component of social change for an ethnic community. Assimilation can best be conceptualized by viewing the process of cultural diffusion on a continuum from conflict to convergence, the final state of convergence being the end product of assimilation. Simultaneous to the process of assimilation is the alienation from the props of the ethnic group which imparted a sense of identity. Such removal of the props, especially when it is too rapid and too excessive, results in an identity crisis. It is also important to distinguish between acculturation (the process of simply accepting strange cultural elements, which might be quite external) and assimilation (the process of accepting basic values underlying the cultural elements). Secularization occurs when there is an exchange of sacred and profane values. Milton Gordon's theory of cultural pluralism, particularly, allows for the preservation of sectarian ideology.

At least three phases mark the assimilation of Canadian Mennonite Brethren from 1925 to 1975. The first generation encountered its severest conflict, socially, in the initial adjustments as immigrants, economically, during the depression, and ideologically, during World War II. The second generation rapidly acculturated in the decades after the war, but encountered casualties of alienation. Upward social mobility accelerated the assimilative process. Change of language, while culturally traumatic, has but given the sectarian movement greater religious credibility, and centennial celebrations helped precipitate the identity crisis. The third generation in the last decade of study shows signs of convergence with the dominant society, thus, accentuating the identity crisis.

Empirical data, based on the response of different generational groups to variables of religiosity, suggest no loss of faith or secularization between the first and second generations, but a significant decline between the second and third generations. Herberg and Hansen's thesis that "what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember" is called into question.

Despite the toll of assimilation on the third generation, the current identity crisis has consequences in secularization which augur well for the continuity of sectarianism. The search for an identity has generated a self-examination which is resulting in a reformulation of theological and ethical statements (an updating, as it were, without sacrificing the sectarian separateness), a reconsideration of the denominational designation (which does not mean a change necessarily), a rediscovery of the true, spiritual heritage (not confusing it with mere traditionalism), and a reaffirmation of denominational and national separateness. The consequence of the crisis of identity can then be summarized as a purging of marginal commitments (those who have ambivalent loyalties defect or are renewed in their commitment) and a purging of ethnic homogeneity (restoring the ethnic heterogeneity of sixteenth-century Anabaptism). The secularizing effect of assimilation, once again, has had both negative and positive effects. Despite the loss of faith and loss through defection, the membership continues to grow as the dialectic between sacralization and secularization stimulates religious vitality. Canadian Mennonite Brethren seem to persist in their sectarianism in the face of seductive secularization.

Again, the foregoing factors contributing to change have had an overall secularizing effect upon Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Yet, the cumulative impact of secularization is not total convergence with the host society, since the sacralizing components of continuity examined earlier served as checks and balances to excessive adaptation. We must, in conclusion therefore, look a little more closely at this see-saw relationship which appears to account for sectarian viability.

IV. Conclusion: Quo Vadis, Mennonite Brethren?

In conclusion, I wish to ask, "Whither bound, Mennonite Brethren?" To answer the question, I shall first look back and summarize the foregoing argument for the persistence or viability of sectarianism, as illustrated by the Canadian Mennonite Brethren from 1925 to 1975. Applying the same theory, I shall then look ahead and venture a prognosis on the basis of identifiable trends.

The viability of sectarianism. Having ascertained the cumulative impact of the synthetic process of sacralization and the analytic process of secularization, one can further assess how both of these forces are essential to a viable form of sectarianism. By itself, the integrating process of sacralization may lead to continuity, but without adequate checks such continuity would result in a rigidification which would stifle the vitality of such sectarianism in contemporary society. So also, by itself the differentiating process of secularization may rapidly lead to change in the religious movement, but again, without adequate checks, such change would result in total convergence with the host society and loss of the sectarian stance. Both sacralization and secularization are essential, therefore, to lend viability to sectarianism in contemporary society. The forces of integration and differentiation constitute a yin/yang complementarity, the dialectic of which keeps a sectarian movement alive in an age otherwise known for decreased transcendence and increased immanence in religious symbolism.

Within the dialectic of sacralization and secularization, one can further discover a yin/yang complementarity in which religion is treated both as an independent and dependent variable. In keeping with the thesis of Max Weber, the components of continuity demonstrated how religion can serve as an independent variable and consequently influence forces in society. A sectarian theology accounts for the Archimedean fulcrum which helps define the boundaries. The biological and cultural links have been given sacred meaning because of their significance. The individual and group identity have also been sacralized, even as socialization has been thoroughly saturated with religious content, while the structural network and action-oriented bases are religiously legitimated. Religion is treated as an independent variable to account for the continuity. At the same time, it also becomes the dependent variable, in which society determines religion (or lack of it), as Emile Durkheim would have us believe. Education relativizes religious beliefs and conservative ethics, urbanization makes a movement accessible to the hazards of fragility, occupational change exposes the proponents of religious beliefs to new testings, upward social mobility leads to less reliance on religious motivation, and assimilating with society tends to disguise the religious distinctive. It is only as one views religion simultaneously as an independent and dependent variable that one more fully understands

the complexity of the forces at work and how Canadian Mennonite Brethren have persisted in the face of continuity and change. The viability of sectarianism is explained, therefore, in terms of the ongoing dialectic between integration and differentiation.

Survival strength for Mennonite Brethren. Some 450 years after the birth of Anabaptism, some 125 years after a renewal movement spawned Mennonite Brethren, and some sixty years after a major immigration to Canada, Mennonite Brethren show signs of distinctive religious vitality. It appears that as long as the movement is buttressed by such components of continuity as clear boundaries of beliefs and ethics, family solidarity and church participation, and unifying institutions and conference structures, Mennonite Brethren will withstand excessive secularization. And these components need not remain the same. Ethnicity, for instance, may well vanish, but a new identity may be forged by a renewed understanding of the Confession of Faith, a recommitment to some common tasks, and an experience of renewal from within and voluntary growth from without.

So also, instead of the same erosive forces of change and secularization experienced hitherto, there appear to be new demons of conformity to the world, all products of the Enlightenment, as identified by Leslie Newbigin--the principle of equality, implying independence rather than interdependence; the pursuit of happiness as a proper goal, thus leading to narcissism; the duty of the government to secure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for every person, resulting in limitless expectations; the vision of an earthly utopia by liberation of reason, scientific progress, and exploitation of nature; and the belief that science is key to truth, but which has led us to the brink of disaster (Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983,31). Yes, these demons will also take their toll as Mennonite Brethren are increasingly attracted by middle-class respectability, a privatized and leisure-oriented life-style, regionalism, and a dichotomization of worldliness (science as religion, word vs. deed, small vs. big, rich vs. poor). Some Mennonite Brethren will continue to defect and join more fundamentalistic denominations; others will align themselves with the more established churches of society. Some schools and para-church agencies, with their reliance on regional or individual support structures, will fragment Conference strength and unity. I predict, however, as long as the countervailing forces of identity formation remain strong and clearly focused, such erosive strain should not seriously impact denominational vitality. Hence, while the recent loss of religious commitment reported in the Toews/Konrad/Dueck study may grieve us, it should not surprise us. One must, at the same time, not lose sight of the comparatively high level of measurable religiosity in the face of the seductive society in which we live. There appears to be ample evidence for continued viability for many years to come.

Finally, it may appear to some that to speak of "survival strength" is simply not enough. As a missiologist, I am not satisfied with a maintenance or survival mentality, and I would like to speak of church growth instead. As a sociologist, however, very conscious of Peter Berger's dictum that things are not what they may seem, I temper my would-be idealism in my prognosis with the realism that the data suggests. It probably helps to wear both hats. To suggest that Mennonite Brethren will have survival strength in tomorrow's society is to suggest that they may well be a prophetic people seeking to do their distinctive part in the extension of God's kingdom.

Peter M. Hamm

November 14, 1986