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Main content

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Abstract. The writing of Canadian Mennonite history changed significantly during and after the 1960s. Before 1960 Mennonite historians were usually leaders, preachers or teachers who wrote mainly for their own people, emphasizing mainly Mennonite distinctives and attempts to separate themselves from "the world." Non-Mennonites wrote most of the Mennonite history read by outsiders. After 1960 many Mennonite leaders and amateur historians, and also some who were academically trained, continued to write primarily from the perspectives--and in harmony with--the discipline of their denominational communities of faith. Others, trained in the graduate schools of secular universities, wrote new and different Mennonite histories in which they matched the themes and stylistic cadences of secular history. As a result, many found themselves with one foot in hut the other outside their Mennonite communities. There is considerable overlap between the several kinds of history, but after 1960 Mennonite history included the voices and stories of many more people striving, in different ways, to apply in their individual and collective lives the teachings of Jesus and of their unique and cherished Anabaptist/Mennonite/Christian heritage. The historical record has, however, become much more diverse.

Authors are sometimes a little sensitive when reviewers find fault or suggest they should have written something different than what they have written. But there are also times when reviewers and critics surprise an author by making him or her sound smarter or to say something more profound than the author realized. That was my reaction when reading James Urry's comments on the titles Paul Toews and I had given the volumes of our respective history books. The title of Paul's book is *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, while I titled my book *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*. Here are Urry's comments on those two titles.

One aspect you may not have considered ... is the different cataloguing classification of your vol. 3 and Paul's vol. 4 of your respective North American histories. Your book is clearly placed by the Canadian cataloguers in the Library of Congress system and the Dewey Decimal system in Canadian History as the primary classification. But Paul's is placed in Religion books, along with the raggle-taggle religious groups that follow the really important denominations in western histories of the church. Now there must be something more than just symbolic in all this? I could be daring and suggest it is also reflected in the emphasis of the two works. But then, of course, Paul has "religious community" in the title; you have "people." And to develop these musings further, you place Mennonites in a nation state, "Canada." Paul places them in American "society," a much more non-specific grouping. You have Mennonites "transformed;" he combines an external aspect of change, "modernity," with an internal continuity of "persistence." What's in a title? Perhaps a whole history and/or a different historiography? (1)

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