

# Mennonite Identity and the Writing on the ‘New Giving’ since 1945

Steven M. Nolt, *Goshen College*

In 2004 Mennonite Church USA introduced “Firstfruits Direct Giving,” an electronic funds transfer service whereby church members could authorize the regular and automatic debit of funds from their bank accounts to congregational or church agency treasuries. An upbeat press release touted “transfer tithing” as a new chapter to Mennonite philanthropy, and quoted satisfied user Brenda Shelby, of Atlanta, Georgia, who loved the simplicity of it all: “You don’t have to think about it!”<sup>1</sup>

Shelby might well have been describing the writing of Mennonite history. Giving is ubiquitous in the human experience, but historians have not thought much about it; at least their thoughts about the philanthropy of money have not often explicitly shaped their research questions or resulting narratives.<sup>2</sup> Scholars may chart the rise of a cash economy in place of one dominated by commodities, or even cite electronic transfer as an illustration of invasive technological innovation. But *giving*, as it flows through and reconfigures these factors has elicited little historical analysis.

Recently, however, a few North American historians have begun turning their attention to giving, and their work has produced a fresh historiography of philanthropy that focuses on identity and social relationships. “Giving is power,” social historian Laura Tuennerman-Kaplan, one of the leading voices in this emerging field, says, while reminding us that such power is widely dispersed and cannot be corralled under the rubric of social control.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the new history reveals more than ever that giving is a grass-roots phenomenon that is difficult fully to track, let alone direct or manage. Recent scholarship has debunked the assumption that the wealthy are the only givers worth discussing, and has focused on giving as dynamically relational. Linked to notions of obligation and reciprocity, giving “has had the effect of incorporating individuals into larger social networks.”<sup>4</sup> Giving is a way of making social meaning and creating and sustaining identity—and such meaning-making and identity creation may be quite independent of established churchly structures that hope to channel

charity. In other words, giving may be a mechanism for individuals to endorse ideals articulated by elites, or it may suggest ways in which ideals are divorced from practice and that grassroots ideals differ from those put forward by elites.<sup>5</sup>

This new historiography holds promising prospects for advancing the state of the art of Mennonite history. First, the new scholarly approach to giving offers the possibility of illuminating the slim, but suggestive literature that does exist on Mennonite charity. Second, it suggests a new lens for reading Mennonite primary sources of the past sixty years (a distinct epoch in the annals of giving) that Mennonite history has otherwise overlooked or understood on other terms. And finally, following leads provided by the new giving scholarship may highlight historical agents and agency in the Mennonite story that traditional narratives have overlooked.

### **Mennonite Identity, Economics, and Giving**

At first blush the social historians' new approach hardly seems novel when viewed against the well-worn contours of Mennonite historiography—and scholarship in the social sciences—that has long concerned itself with the subject of identity, and which had generated, even if somewhat more tardily, a literature on Mennonites and economics. Closer inspection, however, reveals little work that has tackled Mennonite giving directly, and few places where the subject has been integrated or even acknowledged in the major narratives.

For much of the mid-twentieth century, scholars of Mennonitism equated identity with distinctive, if not unique, ideological claims. Giving, then, when it occasionally rose to the level of academic inquiry, served as one of several measurable expressions of characteristic Mennonite beliefs; giving was an illustration of inherent values. Thus, in 1954 historians Cornelius Krahn and Robert Kreider, along with social ethicist J. Winfield Fretz, explained “Altruism in Mennonite Life” as a collective expression of Christian generosity and mutual aid that inevitably spills over to serve those outside the church. Formal education in such matters was far “less the product of conscious cultivation than a derivative from a disciplined brotherhood way of life.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, a modest but noteworthy mid-century literature on mutual aid—largely inspired by Fretz—often alluded to philanthropy when seeking to give concrete illustration to an otherwise vague value of community. Such accounts, typically cast in prescriptive theological form rather than as descriptive case studies, presented giving as a reflection of timeless values, not as an activity that created community or that might be contested.<sup>7</sup> The closest anyone came to acknowledging

a more instrumental role for giving was historian Melvin Gingerich's musing on the possibility that Mennonite generosity served to resolve the unease givers' felt in their personal relationships with God as they measured their wealth against the asceticism found in foundational Anabaptist writings.<sup>8</sup>

By 1970 when historian James C. Juhnke penned a provocative essay on giving, scholars of the Mennonite experience were developing more complex understandings of Mennonite identity that included external, contextual factors and assumed that identity might change over time. Juhnke argued that Mennonite philanthropy emerged less from in-group theological conviction and practice than from a mix of desire for civic respectability and a sense of social guilt for not having sacrificed as soldiers or suffered as war victims. "Mennonites have drawn upon the spiritual resources of militant American nationalism for [the] very benevolent programs which are held to be uniquely and distinctive Mennonite contributions," Juhnke noted in highlighting what he saw as "the essentially irony of our position." Mennonite relief and development work, "long understood as a chapter in the recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, is also a footnote to American nationalism," he concluded.<sup>9</sup> In linking giving and nationalism Juhnke became one of the first to present charity as a means of strategically situating Mennonites in relation to their neighbours and not as a passive reflection of innate values. Yet Juhnke's argument raised more questions than it answered. His description was limited to United States, but his unit of analysis was giving to the bi-nationally-supported Mennonite Central Committee. If American-style nationalism prompted Mennonite giving, what fueled Canadian financial generosity? No doubt the relatively recent immigration of many Canadian Mennonites, facilitated by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), engendered loyalty to that agency, but the obviousness of such claims only obscured the possible presence of other factors external to the Mennonite community.

Juhnke's focus on MCC foreshadowed a turn in Mennonite scholars' interpretation of identity. Since the 1970s, sociologists and historians increasingly presented Mennonite identity as revolving around formal institutions. Sociologists Howard Kauffman, Leland Harder, and Leo Driedger employed such assumptions in their Church Member Profile studies of 1972 and 1989; Donald B. Kraybill declared denominational institutions the new ethnicity; and Driedger organized his several studies of the implications of Mennonite urbanization around these themes.<sup>10</sup> By 1996 historian Paul Toews was arguing that the emergence of an extensive post-World War II system of institutions had allowed Mennonites successfully to translate traditional convictions into new social locations and intellectual plausibility structures.<sup>11</sup> But despite the attention to the ideological significance of church institutions,

their most basic origin and practical perpetuation remained strangely shrouded in scholarly tales. Obviously, these structures required money to operate, but where did that cash come from? How was it generated, and what kept it coming? Such questions were only obliquely—if ever—addressed in the Mennonite identity literature that focussed on institutions. The analysis rested on what the institutions provided or did not provide, not on what Mennonites gave—or refused to give—in relation to them.

Perhaps questions of financial reciprocity would have best been addressed in the arena of economics, but even here, giving was not prominent. By the 1980s Mennonite historiography had come to recognize the role of economics in Mennonite life—from employment patterns to the accumulation of wealth—yet what happens to disposable wealth remained in the scholarly shadows, a curious situation given the earlier energy that Mennonite academics put into analyzing the practice of mutual aid. Even Ted Regher, the historian perhaps most attuned to the importance of economics, has connected money and identity through lucid discussions of occupational change and urbanization rather than by uncovering patterns of giving.<sup>12</sup> Occasional allusions to giving as a means of social control, such as the suggestion that “special donations to the foreign missions budget protected even the greediest and most unscrupulous employers from any form of Mennonite Brethren church discipline,” are undocumented and fail to recognize giving in complex terms.<sup>13</sup>

Sociologist Calvin Redekop, a leading voice in the literature on Mennonites in business, has stressed the tension that exists between churchly community ideals and the exigencies of individualistically-oriented entrepreneurship. Yet, Redekop’s work does not explore the dynamic of giving. To his credit, Redekop avoids the philanthropy-as-social-control trope, but neither does he detail the way in which giving might create or dissolve, strengthen or dilute relationships between Mennonite business givers and a wider Mennonite world.<sup>14</sup>

Mennonite economists have similarly focused on the assumed problem of accumulating wealth or the role of capital in a complex economic system, rather than on the power inherent in philanthropy and the relationships such philanthropy creates, sustains, and ends.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, James M. Harder is all but alone in his exploration of the dynamics of Mennonite giving—giving that he describes as a function of Mennonites’ socio-economic position and relationship to larger market forces. Lower and lower-middle income household give proportionately more money to local congregations and specific mission projects and programs, Harder explained in 1997, whereas upper and upper-middle income households give disproportionately to large self-standing institutions, such as colleges, museums, and hospitals. As

North American income disparity increases (somewhat faster in the U.S. than Canada), and disposable incomes of lower and lower-middle income households fall while that of their wealthier compatriots increase, Harder says Mennonite giving to local, congregational, and area conference projects will decline, even as some other entities continue to command dollars. Thus, Harder concludes, Mennonite giving is a by-product of larger economic realities.<sup>16</sup> Harder's thesis suggests more complexity than Mennonite historiography has yet assigned to charity, but the somewhat deterministic favour of his conclusion differs from the dynamic and adaptive understandings that characterize the recent relational analyses put forward by non-Mennonite social historians.

Indeed, the new historiography of giving would challenge all of the thoughtful contributors to the Mennonite discussion of this subject to move beyond a focus on relationships that motivate giving—whether internal churchly ones, civic national ones, and broader economic ones—and consider instead the kinds of relationships that giving creates. Mennonite historiography would do well to consider giving and the formation of relationships more broadly, exploring the ways giving (and not just the institutions receiving money) form patterns of Mennonite identity.

### **Relational Giving and Mennonite History**

The Global Mennonite History Project's orienting question, What is North American about the North American Mennonite experience? is apropos when considering Mennonite giving. Distinctive (not unique) factors include a cash economy and law of agency that allows wealth to be converted and transferred easily in the form of money, and legal structures—tax codes and foundations—that provide incentives to give to causes the state defines as legitimate charities.<sup>17</sup> Tax deductions or credits for individuals' giving have been part of income tax law since 1917 in the United States and 1930 in Canada, put in place with official hope that such structures would, in the words of one Royal Commission, "promote munificence or at least to protect charities against the indirect consequence of high rates of income tax on those who sustain them."<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, governments provide the possibility of minimizing capital gains taxes and corporate taxes if donors give to chartered charitable foundations. These legal structures, then, not only reward giving, but also direct it in particular ways; not only sustain charitable entities through giving, but engender new ones, such as Mennonite Foundation (1952), Brethren in Christ Foundation (1972),<sup>19</sup> Mennonite

Foundation of Canada (1973), and Mennonite Brethren Foundation (1991). These foundations illustrate the complex ways Mennonites respond to contexts that in turn act back on those who created them.

The past sixty years present a particular philanthropic context, and attention to Mennonite giving as a dynamic, relational activity provides perspectives on Mennonite identity in this recent period. Attempts to manage and facilitate the new giving of these decades were matched by givers' determination to make meaning through philanthropy apart from established channels.

### **Managing and Facilitating the "New Giving"**

The years after World War II marked the advent of a new style of giving that was cash-oriented, more frequent, highly donor directed, and able to be channelled to increasingly specific causes—Mennonite and otherwise. The postwar revolution in rural life whereby yeoman farms consolidated into large agribusiness and turned rurally-reared populations into urban and suburban salaried and hourly employees, meant that Mennonite givers increasing swam in an economy where wealth was highly liquid and giving could more easily involve many small transactions rather than large, occasional transfers than might accompany generational succession.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the 1940s had produced, on both sides of the border, a far-reaching scheme of mass income taxation.<sup>21</sup> In Washington, D.C., the Revenue Act of 1942 transformed a tax that had touched only a few into a broad-based system involving withholding weekly earnings.<sup>22</sup> In Ottawa, the lingering 1917 War Income Tax Act (which, as critics had predicted, had not expired with the Great War) was transformed into the permanent Income Tax Act of 1948.<sup>23</sup> Both structures had already included incentives for charitable giving, but the 1940s income tax expansion to cover classes that included most Mennonites made them suddenly significant.

If larger economic forces and legal structures made certain kinds of giving more likely and more financially rewarding, the birth of a remarkable array of permanently budgeted Mennonite institutions, which were eager for funds and ready with specific solicitations, was a third piece of the new giving picture.<sup>24</sup> There was an explosion of such structures in the 1950s-1970s; several dozen spun off Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), alone, and the various church conferences created dozens more, from secondary schools and mental health care facilities, to camps and expanded mission programs.<sup>25</sup> In fact, economist Harder has argued, there was a direct connection between the remarkable growth of middleclass income in the post-war years

and, in his example, the burgeoning number of offices, programs, and staffed activities of the General Conference Mennonite Church programs in the U.S. and Canada.

But the new giving not only made possible a network of institutions that offered itself as a fresh definition of symbolic ethnicity, it also engendered institutions that facilitated the new giving. While some Mennonite groups had employed endowment funds since the 1920s and economist Carl Kreider had encouraged fellow church members to invest in denominational charitable annuities as a means of helping others while helping themselves, the increasingly complex environment of taxes and charitable choices soon rendered the traditional approach of occasional alms fund giving obsolete.<sup>26</sup> Manson, Iowa, businessman Edwin E. Swartzentruber may have been the first to raise the possibility of establishing a churchly charitable foundation to service gifts and minimizing the impact of capital gains taxes. At least Swartzentruber was one of a growing number of business people who suggested the idea to Chris L. Graber, the Goshen, Indiana, based entrepreneur and churchman who also served as manager of the fledgling Mennonite Mutual Aid. Givers like Swartzentruber were eager to connect with the expanding array of Mennonite institutions, and helped create a new institution to do so, as denominational leaders approved incorporation of the Mennonite Foundation (MF) in late 1952.<sup>27</sup>

Similar programs emerged in Ontario and Manitoba in the 1960s (the lag perhaps due in part to the less stringent Canadian capital gains penalties at the time) and combined in 1973 to form Mennonite Foundation of Canada.<sup>28</sup> Three years later, John R. Dyck, who had helped create MFC, helped organized a Mennonite commodities receptacle (in the U.S. such giving flowed through the MF), which in 1983 added other churches and the cooperation of the Canadian International Development Agency to become the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, older institutions for facilitating giving were displaced in the churchly shift toward laicization that typically also resulted in professionalization. In (Old) Mennonite circles the office of deacon, once a center for coordinating congregational giving, disappeared as congregations sought to flatten ecclesial hierarchies and replace ordained figures with experts who now chaired the variously-named congregational finance committees, budget committees, or stewardship committees.<sup>30</sup> By 1959 the denomination was touting the need for estate planning, and the next year hired John H. Rudy, a former chemical engineer, corporate manager, and pastor from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, as traveling consultant. Rudy's work quickly expanded, and by 1965 he was employed fulltime. As care for widows gave way to more complicated estate planning that promised to make destitute widows a thing of the past, Mennonites turned to financial planners and

giving was bound up with investment advice and navigating around probate.<sup>31</sup> (Where Mennonites who fell below the middle class fit in this new pattern was not entirely clear; sometimes they became the focus of new or continued direct charity or so-called sharing fund projects, efforts that increasingly seemed old fashioned in a professional, post-deacon world.)

A sustained attempt to manage and facilitate philanthropy emerged in the form of what came to be called “stewardship education,” which cast a high profile from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s as Mennonite leaders and institutional administrators sought both to increase donations and to explain the new giving in theological terms. The North American (Old) Mennonite story illustrates these developments. In the early 1950s the denomination commissioned former Hesston College president Milo Kauffman for an extensive speaking mission to make a new case for giving. Kauffman argued that contemporary trends had rendered the traditional system of ad hoc collections managed by lay deacons obsolete. Congregations needed planned giving programs and unified budgets.<sup>32</sup> A 1955 statement urged “all our members to practice ‘graduated giving,’ that is, increased the percentage returned to the Lord as the income becomes greater.”<sup>33</sup> (This, in light of researcher Melvin Gingerich’s conclusion, that Mennonites gave only 3.8% of their income.) Symbol of these sentiments was the 1965 booklet “Our Mission is One,” which was distributed to each (Old) Mennonite household and sought to explain “the many expressions of the changes in the life of our brotherhood,” the need for money to make it all happen, and the “planned distribution program of the Mennonite Church [as] an attempt to put our understanding of ‘one-ness’ of the church’s mission into practice.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Making Meaning Through Giving**

But if the new stewardship education (which in various forms continued through the 1990s, e.g., Mennonite Mutual Aid’s [MMA] “Giving Project”) consistently cast giving in terms of giving back to God what is in fact God’s to begin with, Mennonites doing the giving continued to consider the act a means of creating or severing relationships with other humans.<sup>35</sup> To the degree that leaders were successful in encouraging increased giving, they were unable to manage the results or convince givers to act without agency. In fact, giving now provided a new way for Mennonites to express their dissent. Holding back a cheque was perhaps now more significant symbol than refraining from participation in communion as a means of signalling dissatisfaction with fellow church members.



Even when no such animosity was present, and despite the bold mid-1960s claims of "Our Witness is One," (Old) Mennonites in the U.S. and Canada increasingly directed their dollars to local causes. While 51% of offering plate receipts stayed in local church budgets in 1964, by 1995 78% did.<sup>36</sup> During the same years General Conference Mennonite giving displayed a similar shift, from congregations keeping about 55% of monies received to about 70%.<sup>37</sup> For its part, Mennonite Brethren per capita giving in 1996 was impressively higher than that of many other denominations, but 77% of that money stayed in local budgets where givers had the most control over how it was used.<sup>38</sup>

Some of the new local expenses came from a marked increase in salaried pastoral and support staff, and newly remodelled church buildings. But whatever the designation or one's evaluation of the trend, it was clear that in the midst of a society dominated by homogenizing commercialization and transnational commerce, the relationships Mennonites demonstrated they valued, through giving, were increasingly those close to home. In 2000, as stories emerged of budget slashing and staff layoffs at national and area conference levels, members of U.S. General Conference and Mennonite Church congregations told Hartford Seminary Foundation surveyors that their congregational budgets were in better shape in 2000 than they had been in 1995.<sup>39</sup> Entities seeking Mennonite dollars adapted themselves to the new environment, employing ever more specific special project solicitations, or asking missionaries to raise their own support from individuals who know them personally.

None of this would be surprising to historians of giving. Despite the efforts, noted above, to manage giving and direct donations, giving is a remarkably free enterprise. While it is impossible to determine with any precision, it is clear that Mennonites give to a wide range of non-Mennonite causes, religious and non-religious. Such giving is a critical part of Mennonites' participation in their local communities through United Way campaigns, arts underwriting, conservation causes, or political campaigns. In other cases Mennonites give in support of family or friends who serve with other-than-Mennonite religious ministries. In 2003, 31% of the US\$31 million distributed to charity by the Mennonite Foundation, and 35% of the Can\$3 million distributed by the Mennonite Foundation of Canada went to non-Mennonite entities.<sup>40</sup> So even among a self-selected group of individuals who were predisposed to work with a Mennonite trust fund and were doing long-term estate planning (rather than responding to immediate charitable requests) a third of giving was directed to non-Mennonite causes. It seems safe to assume that in a larger, more encompassing pool of Mennonite giving an even greater percentage would be going toward other-than-Mennonite institutions. If giving is critical to

creating and sustaining giver identity, then such charitable patterns underscore the fact that *Mennonites'* identity cannot be equated with *Mennonite* identity. Through charitable giving, Mennonites create and affirm significant ecumenical and community civic relationships that tie them to their North American neighbours in critical ways. We need to know more about this giving, though admittedly it is challenging to locate accurate data.

Yet even if one looks only at explicitly Mennonite causes or institutionalized recipients, it is clear that giving has been dynamic, and that it is in giving itself—as much as or more than in the supported institutions per se—that Mennonites donors have made meaning. Beginning in 1957, for example, an avenue for giving quite different from the charitable foundation or the consolidated congregational budget emerged in the form of local “relief sales”—popularly organized auctions that raised money for Mennonite Central Committee, but which were independent of MCC and accountable to their own local, self-perpetuating boards.<sup>41</sup> As Ervin Beck has explained, the relief sale phenomenon allowed those who were less well connected to the new post-war giving structures—women whose contributions in sewing or cooking, and modest and lower-income folks who bought food—to be active players, in the company of just enough big-spending contributors to produce dramatic bids that created an excitement and festival-like atmosphere.<sup>42</sup> That Mennonite intellectuals have for years criticized relief sales as hypocritical exercises in indulgence that contradict MCC’s goals, only underscores the sales’ independence. So, too, does many of the sales’ continued use of the language of “feeding the hungry” long after MCC itself abandoned such terminology and philosophy in favour of economic development and ministries of accompaniment. MCC gladly receives relief sale proceeds, but has not tried to co-opt the sales, nor could it likely do so, since the sales are more about local Mennonite efforts to engage in a collective project than about the international agency itself.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, the relief sale model has migrated and morphed into auctions for other local or international causes, construing participant identity in different ways. Since 1978, for example, many Amish and some conservative Mennonites in the U.S. have employed the relief sale format in a series of so-called Haiti Relief Auctions to raise money for development projects on that island that are not necessarily Mennonite-linked (even though there would be MCC-affiliated Haiti work they could support). Yet it would be a mistake not to consider these sales as part of contemporary Amish-Mennonite self-understanding, despite the direction the funds are channelled. The auctions feature Amish and Mennonite donors, auctioneers, and bidders—in fact, observers agree that participants here are more

exclusively Amish and Menmonite than are crowds at MCC sales. The Haiti auctions function in part as annual ethno-religious festivals as they have spread around the American Midwest, Pennsylvania, and Florida.<sup>44</sup>

A more dramatic example of new giving patterns appears in the rise of Christian Aid Ministries (CAM), a Holmes County, Ohio-based Beachy Amish and conservative Menmonite international relief enterprise which by 2003 was garnering US\$168.4 million annually, more than five times MCC's US\$32.9 annual intake.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, the dollars flowing into CAM highlight the new cash economy that has accompanied the recent flowering of household entrepreneurship among Amish and traditionalists Menmonites formerly tied to less-easily convertible land and commodities wealth. On the other hand, CAM also points to a particular sense of self these supporters create. In 1999 I hypothesized that it was MCC's political activism or advocacy of feminist concerns that had pushed the traditionalist end of the Anabaptist continuum toward CAM. In interviews since then with Old Order Amish who enthusiastically support CAM and have discontinued giving to MCC, however, it became clear to me that they did not know about these aspects of MCC work. Indeed, they knew relatively little at all about MCC. They supported CAM because they knew the regional staff and had personal relationships with those who collected money and material aid. In addition, they perceived CAM to be composed of "our people"—plain-dressing Menmonites who did not use video promotion or other innovative advertising techniques. At least one local MCC relief sale (Daviess County, Indiana) now splits its proceeds between MCC and CAM. Old Order Menmonites in eastern Pennsylvania who used to direct their giving to Menmonite Central Committee, now intentionally structure their giving so that CAM received two times the amount that MCC receives.

Giving to CAM, then, has cultivated new relationships in ways that displace or weaken older ones. There is something of a generational divide here, as an aging cohort of men who sustain inter-Menmonite relationships forged through Civilian Public Service by giving to MCC, is succeeded by younger people who have few connections to the Menmonite world MCC represents. Moreover, the agency's efforts to present itself to these Old Orders has, in some cases, only added to a sense of alienation, according to one senior deacon who ruefully conceded that his desire to continue supporting MCC was an increasingly minority one. In the early 1990s he helped get a group of younger leaders together to hear the organization's pitch, but Akron sent a woman who wore slacks and "dangly" earrings. It was less the fact that the speaker was a woman, than what she wore. "They're very good about understanding people in other parts of the world," the

deacon noted, “but they don’t seem to understand us very well.” Yet the Old Orders’ understanding of themselves is clear through their giving. Unlike the imagined community of latter-day Anabaptist descendants that mainline Mennonite academics have constructed, the Old Order sense of identity is highly relational and immediate, and their giving is another act in forming and formalizing those bonds.<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

If our historiography does not include CAM or the Haiti Relief Auction phenomenon, we are missing important pieces of the Mennonite story that are revealed through the ebb and flow of dollars and directed giving. And if these entities operate under our scholarly radar, their institutional nature does make them easier to track. But it is the less easily quantified and summarized giving that may be even more significant for revealing interplay among larger national contexts, economic forces, and particular-local values and practices that are sites of group identity. Contemporary Old Order Amish giving patterns illustrate this point.

The unprecedented rise in health care costs, especially in the United States, may be a common condition, but it is not singular in its effect. In Amish communities this factor combines with a principled commitment to avoid state-sponsored health plans (for which not a few families would qualify) or commercially available indemnity. In recent years, Amish giving has increasingly centered on covering church members’ medical bills. Although Amish in larger settlements often have negotiated with area hospitals to receive modest discounts in exchange for cash payment within thirty days, the need to find that cash remains urgent and nearly constant. Older deacons compare their work of a couple decades ago, when they received requests for medical assistance a few times a year, to their work now. They typically spend several hours each week in correspondence, money collection, and cheque writing on such matters. It is commonplace for the announcement time which concludes biweekly worship services to include the deacon reading five or six major requests for funds from outside the local church district. In January 2004, for example, in the Nappanee, Indiana, settlement, the birth of premature twins generated an US\$800,000 tab, which the parents’ local 60-member congregation—along with its neighbouring churches and those in other parts of the Midwest—had a month to cover. If this sort of giving within the Anabaptist world could be calculated, it might well dwarf, in per capita or even absolute terms, giving to colleges, mission boards, pastor salaries, MCC, CAM, and other institutions.<sup>47</sup>

This exploration of giving also brings to light an otherwise hidden diversity of definitions at play in the contemporary North American Mennonite world, diversity that attention to giving might better reveal. Undoubtedly, most Mennonites, reliant on national health care or private insurance, do not think of medical costs when considering their “giving,” even as such costs (directly and indirectly) comprise a growing percentage of their personal economies. At the same time, for other, mostly American, members of the Anabaptist spectrum the health care category has come to constitute the focus of their philanthropy. These developments are not insignificant if we consider giving as fundamentally a form of connectivity and an act of identity formation. In other words, for most Mennonites, one of the largest and most contested sectors of contemporary life does not play any particularly “Mennonite” purpose. Health care may engender everything from awe to outrage, but it is a difficult if not impossible site for the shaping of North American mainline Mennonite identity. Meanwhile, modern medicine has only added to the way Old Orders understand themselves individually and collectively—from the symbolic act of having to declare their church membership and name of their bishop when they are admitted to a hospital, to the way the practical gesture of giving is integrally tied to a act of separation as much as survival. Giving, in this case, points us to patterns deeper than the exchange of money, to the ways in which culture, context, and community do or do not intersect in significant North American, and Mennonite, ways.

In the end, greater attention to giving, along the dynamic, relational lines pioneered by the new social history of the philanthropy of money, has much to contribute to the state of the art of Mennonite history. It would connect with traditional historiographic and sociological discussions of identity that have focused on institutions, but greatly expanding those discussions by recognizing the agency residing in institutions’ constituents. This orientation to giving might also push our understanding of Mennonites and economics beyond the polarization of community control and entrepreneurial independence, as well as demonstrate how deeply—and voluntarily—Mennonites are connected to their non-Mennonite neighbours. Moreover, one might apply this analysis at various levels of Mennonite life, from the role of million-dollar development offices to creative congregational studies that explore the meaning of church budgets or the sort of “coerced” giving leveraged through membership dues or levies.<sup>48</sup> The possibilities are extensive.<sup>49</sup> After all, giving is ubiquitous. We just need to think about it.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "Electronic Transfer Tithing Catches On," *The Mennonite*, 21 Dec. 2004, 23.
- <sup>2</sup> I am describing "giving" as the philanthropy of money, rather than the volunteering of time. Both aspects of charity are closely related in the descriptive literature and in the historical record, but for the purpose of this essay, I focus on the first. A fine recent case study that illustrates the linkage of giving and volunteering is Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), e.g., 81-88, 147-51, 218-24.
- <sup>3</sup> The seminal work on philanthropy as social control is Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).
- <sup>4</sup> Laura Tuennenman-Kaplan, *Helping Others, Helping Ourselves: Power, Giving, and Community Identity in Cleveland, Ohio, 1880-1930* (Kent, OH: Kent University Press, 2001), vii, 2-4, 9-24, 154-55. See also Susan A. Ostrander and Paul G. Schervish, "Giving and Getting: Philanthropy as a Social Relation," in *Critical Issues in American Philanthropy: Strengthening Theory and Practice*, eds. Jon Van Til and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 67-98; Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For an historiographic overview, see Stanley Katz, "Where did the Serious Study of Philanthropy Come from, Anyway?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 28 (March 1999): 74-82. For a history of the terminology and concepts surrounding giving, see Merle Curti's entry "Philanthropy," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 486-93.
- <sup>5</sup> For example, Michael Hamilton has shown in his analysis of contemporary American evangelicals and giving that despite their leaders' high-profile focus on verbal evangelism and partisan politics, evangelicals actually give much more money to relief, development, and social service work than to traditional evangelization efforts, and give comparatively nothing in support of political action. See, Michael S. Hamilton, "More Money, More Ministry: The Financing of American Evangelicalism Since 1945," in *More Money, More Ministry: Money and Evangelicals in Recent North American History*, ed. Larry Erskridge and Mark A. Noll (William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 104-38.
- <sup>6</sup> Cornelius Krahn, J. Winfield Fretz, and Robert Kreider, "Altruism in Mennonite Life," in *Forms and Techniques of Altruistic and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), v-viii, 309-28.
- <sup>7</sup> E.g., J. Winfield Fretz, "Mutual Aid among the Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 13 (January 1939): 28-58; (April), 187-209, was a seminal work. For an extensive bibliography see: Willard M. Swartley and Donald B. Kraybill, eds., *Building Communities of Compassion: Mennonite Mutual Aid in Theory and Practice* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1998), 309-16. Significantly, the major work on mutual aid was a collection of devotional meditations prepared by Mennonite scholars in various disciplines, and published as H. Ralph Hernley, ed., *The Compassionate Community* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Association of Mennonite Aid Societies, 1970), which underscored the prescriptive and illustrative use to which occasional attention to giving was put. A more recent example of this line of thought is found in Calvin W. Redekop, *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 250-56, where Mennonite support for service flows entirely from theological beliefs.
- <sup>8</sup> Melvin Gingerich, "Mennonite Attitudes Toward Wealth—Past and Present," in *Proceedings of the Ninth Conference on Mennonite Educational and Cultural*

*Problems . . . June 18-19, 1953* (Newton, Kans.: Mennonite Press, 1953), 89-98. He suggested some younger General Conference Mennonites understood wealth as a gift from God for which one should be thankful; see pp. 94-96.

- <sup>9</sup> James C. Juhnke, "Mennonite Benevolence and Civic Identity: The Post-War Compromise," *Mennonite Life* 25 (January 1970): 37; see also his "Mennonites and the Great Compromise," *The Mennonite*, 23 September 1969, 562-64. Cf. the different assumptions underlying giving for relief in Old Order Amish communities—assumptions that surprised MCC staff member Peter J. Dyck: Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up From the Rubble* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991), 247-49.
- <sup>10</sup> J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptism Four Centuries Later: A Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1975); J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991); Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Donald B. Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity: The Transformation of Mennonite Identity," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Calvin W. Redekop and Samuel J. Steiner (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988), 153-72.
- <sup>11</sup> Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Community* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1996).
- <sup>12</sup> T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 101-96.
- <sup>13</sup> Ted Regehr, "The Economic Transformation of Canadian Mennonite Brethren," in *Bridging Troubled Waters: Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century, Essays and Autobiographies*, ed. Paul Toews (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1995), 105.
- <sup>14</sup> Calvin W. Redekop, Stephen C. Ainlay, and Robert Siemens, *Mennonite Entrepreneurs* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Calvin W. Redekop and Benjamin W. Redekop, *Entrepreneurs in the Faith Community: Profiles of Mennonites in Business* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1996); and Calvin W. Redekop, Victor A. Krahn, and Samuel J. Steiner, eds., *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994).
- <sup>15</sup> E.g., Jim Halteman, *The Clashing Worlds of Economics and Faith* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995) or Henry Rempel, *A High Price for Abundant Living* (Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 2003). Norm Ewert, "Justice, Charity, and Mennonite Economics," in *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics*, ed. by Calvin W. Redekop, Victor A. Krahn, and Samuel J. Steiner (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994), 305-20, focuses on Mennonite ethics and international debt relief, not Mennonite giving. Interestingly, the collection of essays Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop, eds., *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), does not engage money, framing power in ecclesial or ideological terms.
- <sup>16</sup> James M. Harder, "Church-Related Institutions: Driven by Member Commitment or by Economic Forces?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (1997): 377-94. It is difficult to compare U.S. and Canadian numbers on these, and other measures, since the reporting and categories are often not parallel. However, one helpful overview is David Sharpe, "The Canadian Charitable Sector: An Overview," in *Between State and Market: Essays on Charities Law and Policy in Canada*, ed. Jim Phillips, Bruce Chapman, and David Stevens (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 13-48. Among other things, Sharpe suggests some realities that mirror the American trends Harder cites, including larger donors' interest in giving to hospital and educational causes, and lower income givers favoring religious causes. Religious charities, on the whole, did not keep pace with other charities in Canada during the 1990s. In another essay in the same volume, Jen-Chieh Ting and Jane Allyn Piliavin, "Altruism in Comparative International Perspective," pp. 51-86, the authors detail "Canadian-U.S. Comparisons," see esp. pp. 71-73. They conclude

that the differences assumed in some of the theoretical literature are not borne out by the data. Americans and Canadians give to charities at about the same rates, and giver profiles are very similar. Residents of both countries volunteer about the same number of hours a week, though Americans, on average, belong to more voluntary organizations and give fewer hours to each one, while Canadians give more hours to fewer different causes. The one significant difference in monetary giving between the two countries is that U.S. givers direct a larger portion of their giving to religious causes and houses of worship than do Canadian donors. Of course it is important to note that these essays deal with giving in general, and not with Mennonite giving in particular. The comparative value, though, comes from the fact that Harder was setting his Mennonite data in the context of larger U.S. giving patterns—patterns that apparently, in significant ways, mirror conditions in Canada.

- 17 See Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), on cultural, social, and legal factors in the creation of certain kinds of economies.
- 18 David G. Duff, "Charitable Contributions and the Personal Income Tax: Evaluating the Canadian Credit," in *Between State and Market: Essays on Charities Law and Policy in Canada*, ed. Jim Phillips, Bruce Chapman, and David Stevens (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 409. During the immediate war year, 1917-1920, as a temporary expediency, Canadian income tax payers could deduct contributions to war-related Funds. However, as an approved general principle and permanent part of the tax code, charitable deductions were not possible until 1930. Testimony to the significance they see in such tax provisions, registered charities in both countries have complained that the optional standard deduction (in U.S. after 1944 and in Canada after 1957) regardless of one's actual giving, discouraged financial generosity. In Canada, since 1988, the individual's charitable giving tax deduction has become a tax credit, a provision some U.S. states make, but the U.S. federal government does not.
- 19 Known as the Jacob Engle Foundation until 2000.
- 20 John L. Shover, *First Majority, Last Minority: The Transformation of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976); Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 101-47; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 186-90.
- 21 Income tax entered the U.S. Constitution in 1913, and in 1917 became a war-time expediency in Canada. In both places it touched few people until World War II.
- 22 Carolyn C. Jones, "Mass-Based Income Taxation: Creating a Taxpayer Culture, 1940-1952," in *Funding the Modern American State*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37-104, and 107-47.
- 23 Duff, "Charitable Contributions and the Personal Income Tax," 408-12.
- 24 It is worth noting that Mennonites have not been deeply influenced by the so-called "faith principles" that, since the days of orphanage pioneer George Müller and British missionary J. Hudson Taylor, had inspired an important segment of Protestantism to eschew any and all direct requests for cash. Mennonite institutions have never been shy about asking for money; in this respect they followed in the entrepreneurial tradition of Dwight L. Moody.
- 25 Calvin Redekop, "The Organizational Children of MCC," *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* 56 (January 1995), 1-6, and listing of organization, 7-8.
- 26 See file on the 1927-1931 Mennonite Board of Education drive to raise endowment for Goshen and Hesston colleges: V-2-1 "Endowment Drive," Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Ind. (and pro and con endowment editorials in *Gospel Herald*, 27 Oct. 1927, 666-67, and 10 Nov. 1927, 705-706); Carl Kreider, "The Christian Attitude toward Investments," *Gospel Herald*, 9 February 1945, 900-901.
- 27 Steven M. Nolt, "Fifty-Year Partners: Mennonite Mutual Aid and the Church," in *Building Communities of Compassion*, 223-27.



- <sup>28</sup> John Dyck, *A Foundation Like No Other: Mennonite Foundation of Canada, 1973-1998* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Foundation of Canada, 1999).
- <sup>29</sup> See annual reports and other data on CFB at [www.foodgrainsbank.ca](http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca). In 2002-2003 CFB received Can\$3.27 million in grain donations, and Can\$4.88 million in cash.
- <sup>30</sup> After 1965 the portion of congregations with a deacon shrank to less than a quarter.
- <sup>31</sup> We know something about inheritance patterns in traditional agrarian Mennonite communities, including systems of dividing estates and the relationship of male and female heirs. We need to know more about inheritance practices among recent, professional and wage-labor generations.
- <sup>32</sup> Kauffman began his work with the 1952 Conrad Grebel Lectureship, and in 1955 published *The Challenge of Christian Stewardship* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press), which was expanded into *Stewards of God* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1975).
- <sup>33</sup> "Declaration of Commitment in Respect to Christian Separation and Nonconformity to the World," Statement adopted by Mennonite General Conference, 27 August 1955, as reprinted in J. C. Wenger, *The Mennonite Church in America, Sometimes Called Old Mennonites* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1966), 3655-62 (quotation, 357).
- <sup>34</sup> *Our Mission is One: An Interpretation of the Mennonite Church's Work in the World Today* (Scottsdale, Pa.: [Mennonite Church General Council?], [1965?]), 32.
- <sup>35</sup> On recent, official stewardship education efforts, see Daniel Kauffman, *Money and Economic Issues in Mennonite Congregations: A Report on a One-Year Special Project on Money* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Mutual Aid, 1981); and Mark Vincent, *A Christian View of Money: Celebrating God's Generosity* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997). It is worth noting that Mennonites have not been deeply influenced by the nineteenth-century prosperity gospel of E. W. Kenyon that continues to circulate in some North American Pentecostal circles. See Dale H. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1997).
- <sup>36</sup> *Mennonite Yearbook 1966*, 62; *Mennonite Yearbook 1997*, 213. Separating out the 1995 figures for Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada and Northwest Mennonite Conference shows that their category percentages were essentially the same as those of their U.S. are conference cousins.
- <sup>37</sup> General Conference *Handbook of Information 1965-66*, and *Handbook of Information 1997*. The percentages of monies kept for local use are quite similar for Canadian and U.S. General Conference churches, although the percentages going to districts and denominational levels is different due to the fact that Canadian churches also gave to Conference of Mennonites in Canada.
- <sup>38</sup> *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 2004* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 384.
- <sup>39</sup> Susan Biesecker-Mast, *Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Findings of the Faith Communities Today Survey* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Faith & Life Resources, 2003), 38-40.
- <sup>40</sup> E-mail from Chad M. Horning, MF, Goshen, Ind., 23 Sept. 2004, and Rick Braun-Janzen, MFC, Winnipeg, Man., 22 Sept. 2004. As public foundations, Mennonite Foundation and Mennonite Foundation of Canada operate as donor-directed entities, so that disbursements to charities are set by those making the donation; however, see "Guidelines for Responsible Giving" [form 2040069] used by Mennonite Foundation, and which lists nine criteria that MF uses in working with clients. One guideline—though not an ironclad restriction—is that donor-selected charities should be "in harmony with the beliefs and biblical principles generally held by Anabaptists."
- <sup>41</sup> Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988), 361-69; Griselda Shelly, "Relief Sales," *Mennonite Encyclopedia* 5: 759-60.

- <sup>42</sup> Ervin Beck, "The Relief Sale Festival," 200-201, in *MennoFolk: Mennonite and Amish Folk Traditions* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2004).
- <sup>43</sup> During the three MCC fiscal years 2001-2004, MCC received between US\$3.3 and 3.5 million from North America relief sales. E-mail from Ken Langeman, Financial Services director, MCC, Akron, Pa., 18 October 2004.
- <sup>44</sup> The first auction was in northern Indiana to support work of the Mennonite Gospel Mission in Haiti. Four years later a parallel auction began in Ohio, and later others started in Illinois, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Soon the auctions were raising more money than the Mennonite Gospel Mission needed, so the board of fourteen Beachy Amish, Old Order Amish, and Wisler Mennonites who coordinated the auctions began sending funds to a variety of non-Mennonite medical and educational development projects in Haiti.
- <sup>45</sup> CAM was founded in 1981 as Christian Aid for Romania, by David Troyer, a New Order Amish man in Holmes County, Ohio, who soon joined the Beachy Amish church. The name changed in 1988. Today CAM largely distributes food, pharmaceuticals, and clothing. They also distribute a periodical titled *The Seed of Truth*, in several languages. CAM has fifty-two fulltime staff in the U.S. and Ontario. Outside North America, CAM has 50 expatriate and 126 national staff.
- <sup>46</sup> Giving not only strengthens or dissolves historically-linked relationships, it can also forge new ones without historic precedent, such as the recent connections between Mexican Old Colony Mennonites and U.S. Old Order Amish. Robert Rhodes, "Amish Reach Out to Old Colony Communities," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 18 October 2004, 1-2.
- <sup>47</sup> The curious might ask how significant these dollar figures really are. Might the Amish system in some cases actually be less expensive than third party or single payer health plans? Such questions are academically interesting, but miss the point: it is the voluntary giving itself that shapes identity and, in this case, the fact that such giving is increasing (and tied to a high-profile cause) regardless of whether or not its rate of increase is faster or slower than that of insurance premiums or taxes. Further, even if some social theorists argue that tax payers or insurance participants should think of their billing or taxes as "contributions," the voluntary nature of charity has consequences for the social relationships that result; see the pioneering international comparative study Richard M. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).
- <sup>48</sup> Annual church membership dues have been more common among churches of Dutch-Russian extraction and persisted longer in Canada, although in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries some North American Swiss-South German Mennonites used levies to fund the construction of meetinghouses.
- <sup>49</sup> North American Mennonite historiography would also benefit from concerted attention to the much larger topic of the *financing* of the North American Mennonite world, exploring the relative relationship not only of giving, but also of fee-for-service funding that fuels many institutions, and non-Mennonite sources of income: fee for service students at church colleges or patrons of church camps or Provident Bookstores, and government funding in the Canadian context. (Since 1969 MCC Canada has received matching grants from Canadian International Development Agency; by 1994 government grants—CIDA and others—accounted for nearly half of MCCC's income.) The role of endowment income, and the relative growth in funding for different sectors of Mennonite life might also reveal important aspects of contemporary Mennonite relationships, as would some sense—undoubtedly difficult to obtain—of Mennonite giving to non-Mennonite causes.