

Beliefs and Practices of Students in Mennonite and Catholic Schools

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This study assesses the religious commitment of adolescents attending Mennonite and Catholic schools.¹ Some studies (including this study) have tried to assess the relative impact of the religious home versus that of the religious school. Social learning theory (e.g., Bandura, 1977) has suggested some mechanisms which may be involved in the socialization for religious commitment: imitation of and identification with adult models, the attractiveness of adult models, the power of adult models to control reward and punishment, and the emotional ties between the adult model and the young. According to this theory, the success of the socialization outcome would depend both on the effectiveness of the socialization procedures and also on the characteristics (e.g., personality, needs, capacities) of the young to be socialized. The survival of both Mennonites and Catholics within the pluralistic and secular society of North America depends on their ability to socialize the next generation to commitment to their distinctive religious heritages. Siegel (1970) lists such socialization in home and religious school as one of several possible survival techniques ("defensive structures") available to a minority group.

Bibby (1987) has distinguished between an "integrated" (usually religious) meaning system, which informs all areas of life in a consistent way, and a "fragmented" meaning system, which informs only some areas of life and which contains many inconsistencies (e.g., contradictory beliefs, discrepancies between beliefs and practices). Bibby (1987: 43-45) provided evidence that secularization does not involve an abandonment of religion, but represents a shift from an integrated to a fragmented meaning system, or a shift in religious orientation from commitment to consumerism. "Fragmentation" involves both the selective retention of some fragments of traditional religion and also the addition of new fragments. Surveys of Canadian adults (Bibby, 1987: 62-85) have indicated that contemporary Canadian nonchurchgoers and many churchgoers do not reject religion, but have a highly fragmented meaning

system which combines fragments of traditional Christianity (e.g., belief in God) with fragments of other world views (e.g., astrology) in a highly inconsistent way.

The first national sample survey of older Canadian adolescents, i.e., the Project Teen Canada, included some questions about the adolescents' religious beliefs and practices (Bibby and Posterski, 1985:115-128; Posterski, 1985:27-63). The survey found that most adolescents were not hostile to religion, but combined fragments of traditional Christianity with unconventional religion fragments. In this study, both the traditional and the unconventional fragments of the adolescents' religion are assessed.

In his comprehensive survey of Mennonite education studies Friesen (1983:133) noted that "the story of the Mennonites is inextricably interwoven with educational developments" and that conservative Anabaptist groups have conceptualized education primarily as a means of transmitting their religious tradition to the young. He concluded that because of Mennonite education "Mennonites are being absorbed into Canadian society not through assimilation, but by acculturation whereby a minority group adjusts as a group, not individually, to the larger society" (Friesen, 1983:144-145). The empirical studies of Pennsylvania-Mennonite high school students (Hess, 1977; Kraybill, 1977) suggested that Mennonite schools had a moderate, but not a strong, effect on the religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of Mennonite youth. The main impact of the Mennonite school was the avoidance of disapproved practices, rather than a strong religious commitment.

Denys' (1972:160) review of official church documents emphasized that "according to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the purpose of the Roman Catholic high school system is to commit Roman Catholic youth to the Roman Catholic view of life." Several studies done in the United States (Fichter, 1958; Greeley and Rossi, 1966; Greeley, McCreardy and McCourt, 1976; Greeley, 1989; Benson, Donahue and Guerra, 1989) and in Australia (Mol, 1968) suggested that Catholics who had attended Catholic schools had higher levels of religious commitment (e.g., church attendance, generosity to the church) and more positive values (e.g., peace, pro-family, social compassion) than did Catholics who had not attended Catholic schools. These studies also suggested that Catholic schools had a religious impact over and above that of the Catholic family, even when the usual demographic factors were controlled.

In contrast to the above American and Australian studies on Catholic education and religious commitment, the few Canadian studies have failed to find a significant impact of Catholic schooling on religious commitment. Denys (1972:91) studied Catholic high school students attending Catholic and public schools in Ontario. He found that the fathers and best friends of Catholic school students were more religious than those of public school students. After statistical control for parents' and peers' religiosity, Denys

(1972:158) found that Catholic education made a very small independent (i.e., beyond the influence of parents and peers) contribution to Catholic commitment. Currie's (1976a:472) study of older adolescents in Calgary provided further evidence for the low impact of Catholic education on Catholic commitment. He found that Catholic students in Catholic versus public schools reported very similar declines in religious commitment. The different findings about the relationship between Catholic schooling and Catholic commitment emerging from American and Canadian studies probably reflect different national policies of government support for religious schools, that is, no funding of Catholic schools in the United States versus full funding of Catholic "separate" schools in several Canadian provinces (e.g., Ontario and Alberta, but not Manitoba, see Westhues, 1976). The parents of U.S. Catholic school students are probably more self-selected for high religious commitment than are the parents of Canadian separate school students.

Currie's (1976a:463) study of 15 to 24 year old Calgary young people suggested that it is important to distinguish between religious "belonging" (i.e., identification with a religious group) and religious "commitment" (i.e., beliefs and practices). He pointed out that it is possible to socialize young people to religious belonging without socializing them to religious commitment. On the other hand, the socialization to religious commitment tends to be associated with socialization to belonging. Belonging may be maintained without commitment, because religious group membership may give the adolescent a social or ethnic identity or because the adolescent may be subjected to social pressures from family members. Currie found that belonging and commitment may have different functions for different religious groups. Compared to other groups, Roman Catholics reported the highest loss of commitment over time, but they also reported the lowest loss of church membership. The commitment of Evangelicals as a group did not substantially decline, because a decline in commitment of some students was offset by an increase in others; their loss of belonging was average for the sample. It should be pointed out that Evangelicals and Mennonites (but not Catholics) tend to regard high commitment as a prerequisite for "church membership in good standing". One would, therefore, expect higher levels of commitment among those who identify themselves as Mennonites than among those who identify themselves as Catholics.

Currie (1976b) pointed out that religious movements may work toward different kinds of change and may therefore have quite different goals of religious education. The movements may differ as to "locus" in that they attempt to change either individuals or social systems; they may also differ as to "amount" of change in that they either aim for partial or for total change. There may thus be four categories of religious movements: (a) "transformative" movements which aim at total changes in social systems (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslim militants in Iran); (b) "redemptive" movements which aim

at total changes in individuals (e.g., Mennonites, Evangelical churches, charismatic Catholics); (c) "reformative" movements which aim at partial changes in social structures (e.g., liberation theology, World Council of Churches); (d) "alterative" movements which aim at partial changes in individuals (e.g., Anglicanism, mainstream Catholicism). One would expect that Catholic schools would have "alterative" goals while Mennonite schools would have "redemptive" goals. Currie emphasized that a religious group's goals determine the criteria whereby success and failure of religious education are judged and then suggested that the "success" of religious education should be defined as the ability to achieve goals in conformity with the denomination's ideology. He also pointed out that redemptive and alterative movements tend to conceptualize human nature differently: redemptive movements tend to stress the corruption of human nature and the need for conversion, while alterative movements tend to speak about the weakness of human nature. It should be noted that the forerunners of Mennonites have demanded more radical changes in individuals than did the other denominations emerging from the Protestant Reformation; Anabaptists tend to fit the "redemptive" type even better than do contemporary Evangelicals. Currie suggested that redemptive groups tend to have higher levels of religious commitment than do alterative groups. One would therefore expect higher levels of religious commitment among Mennonite and Evangelical students than among Catholic students.

The purpose of this study is to assess the religious commitment of church going adolescents attending Mennonite and Catholic schools. Some insight into the religion of Mennonite school adolescents can be obtained by comparing Mennonite students with those from other denominations. In this study Mennonites and Evangelicals are treated as exclusive categories which share certain characteristics (e.g., redemptive goals), but differ with respect to others (e.g., Anabaptist identity). In line with Bibby's fragmentation model of secularization, this study assesses both traditional Christian and unconventional religious beliefs and practices. Because of socialization for religious commitment in home and/or religious school the church going students of this study were expected to have a more integrated religion (i.e., stronger on traditional Christianity, weaker on unconventional religion) than would other Canadian adolescents. Currie's model suggests that because of the redemptive goals of Mennonite and Evangelical churches/schools, in contrast to the alterative goals of the Catholic church/schools, Mennonite and Evangelical students would have a more integrated religion than would Catholic students. Finally, the study explores as to whether the students' traditional Christian commitment was more closely related to parental religiosity or to exposure to religious schooling.

Research Method

The Sample

A sample of about 1980 junior- and senior-high school students (906 boys, 1074 girls, grade 7 to 12) anonymously completed the Research Questionnaire during regular class hours.² In addition to the Research Questionnaire, the students also completed a Demographic Form. Here, the students were not asked to give their names, but were asked to indicate their school, grade, sex, birth date, denomination, and the congregation/parish they worship in. The information on the Demographic Form was then used to subdivide the sample into the following religious groups:

- (1) Among the 325 church going Mennonites in Mennonite schools about two thirds were Mennonite Brethren with the remainder being Conference of Mennonites and a few other Mennonites.
- (2) The 170 church going Evangelicals in Mennonite schools came from several denominations: 29% of this group were Baptists, 19% came from independent congregations, 16% were Christian Reformed, and most of the remainder came from other Evangelical groups.
- (3) Most of the 1099 church going Catholics in Catholic schools were Roman Catholics; about 10% were Ukrainian Catholics.
- (4) Among the 161 church going Other Christians in Catholic schools 31% were Anglicans, 25% were Orthodox, 16% were Lutherans, 10% were from the United Church, and the remaining students came from a wide variety of religious backgrounds.
- (5) The 211 unchurched students attended either Mennonite or Catholic schools, but stated on the Demographic Form either (a) that they had no religion or (b) that they did not attend any worship services.
- (6) There were 14 students from nonchristian faiths (Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs etc.) who attended either Mennonite or Catholic schools.

The Questionnaire

The Research Questionnaire asked students about their religious beliefs, religious practices, religious self identification, their attendance at religious private schools, and parental church attendance. The Questionnaire items were selected and modified from a much larger questionnaire used by Bibby and Posterski (1985) and Posterski (1985) in a national survey of older Canadian teenagers (Teen Canada Survey). The set of nine questions about beliefs dealt with God's existence, Jesus the divine son of God, life after death, life on other planets, people with psychic powers, having experienced God's presence, demon possession, the use of horoscopes to predict the future, and the communication with the dead. The set of four questions about religious practices dealt with horoscope reading, private prayer, Bible reading, and watching religious television programs. The students' religious self identification was

assessed by asking them to select an alternative which came closest to describing the nature of their religion. The students were also asked about how long they had attended a religious private school and about how frequently their parents attended worship services.

Analyses and Results

Religious Beliefs

More than 85% of the Mennonites and Evangelicals affirmed the existence of God and the divinity of Christ as compared to fewer than 68% of Catholic schools and 38% of unchurched students (shown in Table I). The results were quite similar to those of the Teen Canada Survey (Posterski, 1985:57). Mennonites and Evangelicals also endorsed life after death much more than did other religious groups. Only about one in three Mennonites and Evangelicals reported that they had experienced God's presence. For most students, God tended to be an accepted intellectual truth, but not a personal reality. Mennonites in Mennonite schools consistently endorsed traditional Christian beliefs much more than did Catholics in Catholic schools. Mennonites and Evangelicals endorsed these beliefs to a similar extent.

Very few students of this study endorsed unconventional religious beliefs. Mennonites and Evangelicals endorsed such beliefs least of all. The only exception to this trend was belief in demon possession. About 29% of Mennonites and 36% of Evangelicals accepted demon possession as compared to fewer than 13% of other religious groups. For students in Mennonite schools belief in demon possession tended to be associated with the acceptance of orthodox Christian beliefs, while other Religious Groups tended to associate demon possession with occult beliefs. The Teen-Canada Survey also indicated that, compared to other religious groups, church going Evangelicals accepted demon possession more, but accepted other unconventional religious beliefs less. Even though the unchurched students accepted traditional Christian beliefs less than other religious groups, unchurched students tended to be quite similar to students in Catholic schools with respect to unconventional religious beliefs.

Religious Practices

About two out of three Mennonites and Evangelicals prayed frequently, but fewer than half of both groups read the Bible frequently at home (shown in Table II). The other religious groups reported much less frequent prayer and Bible reading. Very few of any religious group watched religious television frequently. About 23% of all students stated that they read their horoscopes, but only 3% did so frequently. Mennonites and Evangelicals read their horoscopes very little.

Table I
Beliefs

Percentage of students who “**definitely**” believe in the following:

| | Mennonite Schools | | | Catholic Schools | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | All Students N=1980 | Mennonites N=325 | Evangelicals N=170 | Catholics N=1099 | Other Christ. N=161 | Unchurched N=211 |
| God's existence | 69 | 86+ | 89+ | 68 | 64 | 38 |
| Jesus Divine Son of God | 69 | 85+ | 86+ | 69 | 64 | 37 |
| Life after death | 52 | 77+ | 81+ | 46 | 45 | 30 |
| Experienced God's presence | 24 | 35+ | 34+ | 22 | 17 | 15 |
| Life on other planets | 15 | 7 | 5 | 17 | 17 | 22 |
| Demon possession | 15 | 29+ | 36+ | 9 | 9 | 12 |
| Psychic powers | 13 | 5 | 11 | 15 | 15 | 16 |
| Communication with dead | 7 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 9 |
| Horoscopes predict future | 3 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 |

Highlighting:

Positive (+) and negative (-) deviations of 10 or more percent from the overall average (All Students) are highlighted.

Table II
Religious Practices

Percentage of students who “**often**” or “**very often**” engage in the following practices:

| | <i>Mennonite Schools</i> | | | <i>Catholic Schools</i> | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | All Students N=1980 | Mennonites N=325 | Evangelicals N=170 | Catholics N=1099 | Other Christ. N=161 | Unchurched N=211 |
| Private prayer | 46 | 68+ | 63+ | 41 | 51 | 22 |
| Read horoscope | 23 | 10- | 9 | 28 | 23 | 30 |
| Read Bible at home | 17 | 42+ | 44+ | 8 | 13 | 9 |
| Watch religious television | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 2 |

Percentage of students who “**never**” engage in the following practices:

| | <i>Mennonite Schools</i> | | | <i>Catholic Schools</i> | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | All Students N=1980 | Mennonites N=325 | Evangelicals N=170 | Catholics N=1099 | Other Christ. N=161 | Unchurched N=211 |
| Private prayer | 7 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 27+ |
| Read horoscope | 20 | 35+ | 39+ | 13 | 19 | 17 |
| Read Bible at home | 22 | 6- | 4 | 26 | 22 | 46+ |
| Watch religious television | 50 | 41 | 32 | 50 | 58 | 69+ |

Highlighting:

Positive (+) and negative (-) deviations of 10 or more percent from the overall average (All Students) are highlighted.

Table III
Religious Self Identification
Percentage of students describing the nature of their religion by selecting a given alternative:

| | <i>Mennonite Schools</i> | | <i>Catholic Schools</i> | | | Unchurched |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------|
| | All Students N=1980 | Mennonites N=325 | Evangelicals N=170 | Catholics N=1099 | Other Christ. N=161 | N=211 |
| (1) I am not a religious person ... | 9 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 14 |
| (2) I find myself interested in a variety of religions, but am not committed to any particular one | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| (3) I have a mild interest in Christianity and other religions, but I do not see myself as deeply religious | 31 | 26 | 21 | 33 | 37 | 25 |
| (5) I regard myself as a committed Christian | 53 | 64+ | 70+ | 56 | 47 | 51 |

About 2% of the All Students sample stated that they were “deeply committed to a religion other than Christianity” (4).

Highlighting:

Positive (+) and negative (-) deviations of 10 or more percent from the overall average (All Students) are highlighted.

Religious Self Identification

About one-third of the sample (except Evangelicals) could be classified as "a-religious", in that they professed a mild interest in Christianity without any deep religious commitment (see Table III). About 22% of Canadian adolescents and 25% of Canadian adults are a-religious (Bibby and Posterski, 1985:124). About two-thirds of the Mennonite and Evangelical students identified themselves as "committed Christians" compared to about half of the other three religious groups. About 39% of Canadian adolescents and 43% of Canadian adults describe themselves as committed Christians. The other religious self image categories accounted for low percentages of religious schools students. For instance, only 9% of all students regarded themselves as "non-religious". About 25% of Canadian adolescents and 21% of Canadian adults describe themselves as such.

Consolidation of Variables

Factor analysis was used to consolidate the set of individual items into two meaningful scales: (1) Seven items (i.e., the beliefs in God's existence and presence, divinity of Jesus, life after death; the practices of prayer and Bible reading; and religious self identification) were added up to form the Traditional Christianity scale. (2) Six items referring to unconventional-religious beliefs (i.e., life on other planets, psychic predictions of the future, demon possession, communication with the dead and horoscopes) and practices (horoscope reading) were added up to form the Unconventional Religion scale.

The statistical significance of group differences in Traditional Christianity and in Unconventional Religion was examined by analyses of variance and *t*-tests. The results of these statistical tests summarized and confirmed the trends suggested by item based analyses: Mennonites and Evangelicals endorsed traditional Christianity to the same extent; their endorsement was much greater than that of the other religious groups. As expected, unchurched students endorsed traditional Christianity least. The two Catholic schools groups and the unchurched students endorsed unconventional religion to about the same extent. Mennonites and Evangelicals endorsed unconventional religion much less. The results suggest that Mennonites and Evangelicals have a more "integrated" (or less "fragmented") belief system than the other religious groups.

Parental and School Influences

Three of the survey questions referred to parental and school influences on the adolescents' religious commitment: i.e., the number of years the student had attended a religious private school, and the frequency of the mothers' and fathers' church attendance.

Table IV
Parental Church Attendance

Percentage of students answering the questions:

“How frequently does your **mother** attend worship services?”

| | Mennonite Schools | | | Catholic Schools | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | All Students N=1980 | Mennonites N=325 | Evangelicals N=170 | Catholics N=1099 | Other Christ. N=161 | Unchurched N=211 |
| (1) My mother not in my home .. | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| (2) Almost never | 9 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 9 | 47+ |
| (3) Only major festivals | 11 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 19 | 22+ |
| (4) Once or twice a month | 9 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 24+ | 5 |
| (5) Almost every week | 69 | 91+ | 89+ | 73 | 47- | 21 |

“How frequent does your **father** attend worship services?”

| | Mennonite Schools | | | Catholic Schools | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | All Students N=1980 | Mennonites N=325 | Evangelicals N=170 | Catholics N=1099 | Other Christ. N=161 | Unchurched N=211 |
| (1) My father not in my home ... | 8 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 9 | 14 |
| (2) Almost never | 15 | 2 | 6 | 12 | 21 | 52+ |
| (3) Only major festivals | 10 | 1 | 2 | 12 | 20+ | 12 |
| (4) Once or twice a month | 7 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 16 | 6 |
| (5) Almost every week | 59 | 89+ | 80+ | 60 | 35- | 16 |

Highlighting:

Positive (+) and negative (-) deviations of 10 or more percent from the overall average (All Students) are highlighted.

Of all religious groups, Catholics had the longest attendance at religious private schools; more than half (i.e., 55%) of the Catholics had attended religious private schools for seven years or more, compared to only 18% of the Mennonites, 33% of the Evangelicals, 27% of other Christians in Catholic schools and 23% of unchurched students. These differences in religious school attendance reflect local circumstances in Winnipeg. Winnipeg has had Catholic primary schools for several generations. Even though the Mennonite high schools participating in this study are about forty years old, the only Mennonite elementary school in Winnipeg was six years old at the time of data collection. Many of the Evangelicals had attended a Christian Reformed elementary school.

More than eight out of ten Mennonite and Evangelical parents attended worship services almost every week, in contrast to 73% of Catholic mothers and 60% of Catholic fathers (shown in Table IV). As expected, parents of unchurched students showed the lowest frequency of worship attendance.

If the school had a major impact on the students' religious beliefs and practices (as distinct from religious knowledge), then one would expect that students with long religious school attendance would have strong religious commitments. The results did not support this expectation, because there was no relationship (i.e., zero correlations) between length of religious school attendance and either unconventional religion or traditional Christianity scores.

It is often assumed that parents function as role models of religious commitment for their adolescent sons and daughters. This study found a substantial correlation between the mothers' and fathers' church attendance (correlation = .54), that is, if the mother attended church the father tended to attend church also. Parental church attendance was found to be unrelated to unconventional religion. On the other hand, parents who attended church regularly, tended to have sons and daughters who were highly committed to traditional Christian beliefs and practices.

The issue of parent and school influences was then further examined by stepwise regression analysis.³ The regression analysis suggested that for both boys and girls the mother had the strongest impact on traditional Christian commitment, followed by a significant additional impact attributable to the father. The students' traditional Christian commitment tended to be especially strong in families where both parents attended church weekly. Length of religious school attendance did not add significantly to the influence already exerted by parents. The results suggest that home religion, rather than religious instruction in the school, has the greatest impact on the adolescents' religious beliefs and practices.

Summary of the Results

Mennonite and Evangelical students are very similar with respect to the

endorsement of religious beliefs and practices, as well as religious self identification. Church going students attending Mennonite schools endorse traditional Christian beliefs and practices much more and reject unconventional religious beliefs much more than do church going students attending Catholic schools and unchurched students. As expected, unchurched students endorse traditional Christianity less than other groups; however, unchurched students are very similar to Catholics in their endorsement of unconventional religion. Compared to other religious groups, the Mennonite parents' rate of weekly church attendance is highest (about 90%); weekly church attendance of Catholic parents is significantly lower; most unchurched parents rarely or never attend church. The endorsement of unconventional religion is unrelated to parental church attendance and to length of religious private school education. Students from families where both parents attend church weekly tend to be more committed to traditional Christianity than other students. There is no significant relationship between length of religious school attendance and commitment to traditional Christianity.

Conclusions and Implications

Compared to representative national samples of Canadian adolescents (e.g., Bibby and Posterski, 1985) and adults (e.g., Bibby, 1987) the Winnipeg religious schools students and their families are clearly self selected for high religious commitment. They are therefore not representative of Canadian adolescents in general, or even of Catholic or Mennonite adolescents in general.

The results of this study tend to fit Bibby's (1987) fragmentation model of Canadian religion. For instance, the unchurched students combine a low commitment to traditional Christianity with a relatively high endorsement of unconventional religion fragments. The religious group differences in religious commitment found in this study tend to fit closely Currie's (1976b) conceptualization of religious movements. Currie argues that redemptive movements (in this study Evangelicals and Mennonites) tend to have clear goals for individual change (i.e., total commitment). They also provide strong social support for the goal of personal religious growth. Belonging to a redemptive group tends to be associated with meeting expected standards of religious commitment. Wherever commitment wanes, the individual drops out or is excluded from the group. As a result, only committed persons tend to remain in a redemptive group. Mennonites and Evangelicals are both redemptive groups and tend to have very similar levels of religious commitment. It is highly likely that because of greater institutional completeness Mennonites may have a stronger sense of belonging than do Evangelicals, but group differences in belonging were not investigated in this study. In contrast to

redemptive groups, the goals for change of alterative groups are not very clear. Currie (1976a:11) points out that "it is difficult to obtain total commitment to partial change". As a result, the socialization of alterative groups tends to focus on immersion into the subculture of their groups. Such an immersion "is based upon belonging to the group, even though the level of commitment may fluctuate" (Currie, 1976a:12). It is therefore not surprising that the two alterative groups of this study (i.e., Catholic school students) would show lower levels of commitment and more religious fragmentation than the two redemptive groups.

This study suggests that the students' religious commitment tends to be more closely related to parental religiosity (i.e., mother's and father's church attendance) than to the number of years in a religious school. The results agree with those of other studies of religious schools students in Canada. As mentioned before, Denys (1972) found that Catholic students' religious commitment tended to be more closely related to the religiosity of parents and best friends than to the type of school attended (i.e., public versus Catholic school). Similarly, Currie (1976a) did not find any significant relationship between Catholic students' religious commitment and Catholic school attendance. On the other hand, studies done in the United States do suggest that Catholic schools there do indeed promote religious commitment and the development of values, beyond the influences of a religious home. These discrepant findings do suggest that religious schools can under certain circumstances promote religious commitment, but that religious commitment is not an inevitable consequence of religious school attendance. The complex relationships between home, peer and school influences in the socialization for religious commitment require much more detailed study.

The results of this study suggest some implications for Mennonite educators. Compared to Canadian adolescents in general and to Catholic school students, Mennonite school students tend to be more highly committed to orthodox Christian beliefs. Unconventional religious beliefs and practices are not yet a problem in Mennonite schools. There are, however, some signs of religious fragmentation which should be a concern to Mennonite educators. About one out of four Mennonite students in Mennonite schools professes a mild interest in Christianity without deep commitment ("a-religious"). Although most Mennonite students strongly believe in God, only one out of three Mennonite students reports having experienced God's presence. Not all Mennonite school students who endorse orthodox Christian beliefs regularly engage in devotional practices like private prayer and Bible reading. The results of this study suggest that Mennonite educators should carefully consider ways of making the religious socialization in Mennonite schools more effective. Currie (1976b) argued that religious schools should clarify the relationship between their denomination's ideology and their religious education goals. Moreover, Schludermann (1988) suggests that Mennonite educators

should carefully relate their educational practices to their schools' religious education goals; he also provides some suggestions as to how this socialization for religious commitment could be made more effective.

Notes

¹An expanded version of this paper meant for social-science readers can be obtained by writing to the authors at the Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Man. R3T 2N2. The longer paper contains an extensive review of the research literature on religious schooling and commitment, more detailed documentation of the research design and the statistical methods of data analysis, as well as the text of the questionnaire used. The authors greatly appreciate the cooperation received from the school principals, teachers and students, whose help made this study possible. The authors gratefully acknowledge the following colleagues' help at the University of Manitoba: Dean Larry Cooley's (St. Paul's College) assistance in obtaining permission from Catholic schools; Prof. Raymond Currie's (Sociology) helpful suggestions on the literature about Catholic schools; and Prof. Leo Driedger's (Sociology) valuable suggestions.

²The sample consisted of the student population of two coeducational Mennonite high schools (grades 7 to 12), of a Catholic girls' high school (grades 7 to 12), of a Catholic boys' high school (grades 9 to 12), of a coeducational Catholic high school (grades 9 to 12) and of the grade-7 and -8 students of eight coeducational Catholic primary schools. All of these schools are located in Winnipeg. The overall participation rate was 98%.

³In this analysis the three questions on school and church attendance were conceptualized as independent variables (influences), while traditional Christianity was conceptualized as the dependent variable (i.e., the variable influenced or affected by the independent variables). With the all students sample, regression analysis indicated that mothers' church attendance was the best predictor of traditional Christian commitment. The father's church attendance added significantly to the prediction. Adding attendance at a religious private school did not improve the prediction. The regression analyses were very similar, when the data on boys (all boys sample) and on girls (all girls sample) were analyzed separately.

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