

The 'Return' of the Mennonites from the Cuauhtémoc Region to Canada: A Perspective from Mexico

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Introduction¹

The purpose of this paper is to point out several elements of a distinct nature that affect directly and indirectly, the “return” of the Mennonites from the region to the north of the city of Cuauhtémoc, in Chihuahua state, to Canada. It is necessary to note that there isn't much information about these people in general, or about their migrations in particular. I will raise certain considerations, mainly economic, that arise from the available information regarding the “Mexican” context in which the community lives. Regarding their internal affairs, I will refer to the interviews I carried out with Mennonite persons from Cuauhtémoc, especially with my respected friend Peter Rempel. It is also important to note that I was born and raised in this city, and that my book, *Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua: Crónica de su Fundación* is just that, a chronicle of the city's

foundation. As much as was possible, I did a few comparisons between the Mennonites and the Mexican society. I have a high regard for the Mennonite community and some of its members and my early life experiences in Cuauhtémoc help me to understand the subject.

It is quite difficult, if not impossible, to establish direct or physical causes for social events. If this were possible, the social sciences would not exist. Instead, a sort of historical engineering would be utilized; but this would be something as fantastic as the scientific certainties about the weather. What we are able to do and what I will in fact do in my paper, is to point out, in a probable way, the elements of the events preceding a Mennonite “return” to Canada. As a summary, there are five reasons for the temporary and permanent return of the Mennonites of Ciudad Cuauhtémoc to Canada: 1) the effects of the persistence of a Mennonite community in Cuauhtémoc as a distinctive, that is, non-Mexican society, during the past eighty years; 2) the relative scarcity of land; 3) the national economic crisis in Mexico and the opening in Mexico for US and Canadian goods; 4) the search for better conditions of life, including employment and better educational conditions; 5) the effects of the drug and alcohol culture –including their consumption—among the Mennonite youth, for which the Mexican society is generally held to be responsible.

A Distinctive Society

Traditional Mennonites maintain that the persistence of their own way of life depends on the defense from external cultural intrusions. They feel that transactions with surrounding societies can lead them to assimilation and the abrogation of their customs. One necessary condition to avoid these perilous “contaminations” is to live a simple life. With this aim in mind, they established local independent governments, and sustained their own linguistic and cultural means in order to survive in the face of a world far from Christ’s teachings. The way for them to survive as a distinctive society was agriculture and that pursuit, without exaggeration, has been a “heroic” one. As a response to governmental privileges to keep their culture and way of life, Mennonites were tireless in their daily work. Desert or marshy lands received the feverish touch of their minds and hands, and they created relative prosperity for all in what had been just wilderness. But not everything was so idyllic. Mennonites know about people eager to provoke problems and stir up envy and resentment among natives in order to expel them from their lands.

As is well known, in 1919 Canadian Mennonites of the most traditional branch became deeply worried about their community’s

future, due to Mexican federal and provincial policies related to education and military services. This group from Manitoba and Saskatchewan sustained a protective way of life through an ecclesiastical government, empowered to direct the civic and educational life of their community, even the styles of construction of their villages and homes, the nature of domestic implements, transport and work vehicles, and the language, religion and family life. When it was concluded that the Canadian federal and provincial governments were violating their "privileges," a necessary system to protect their way of life, it was time to make a decision. The most traditional as well as the most liberal, within their communities rejected those policies, and foresaw that land scarcity would lead them to disperse within the Canadian society.² This group, dominated by the "Altkolonier", the Old Colonist Mennonites, sought lands with official concessions in the areas of language, religion and schools. They cast their eyes southward, on the far-off country, Mexico. They decided to leave Canada, following the tradition of their ancestors who sold their lands and packed their things when times became difficult, looking for better places to stay. Many of the Mennonite emigrants were Canadian by birth. Once again, it was clear that this distinctive Mennonite society lacked even a minimal adherence to the realities and symbols of the country in which they lived. They preferred to risk their lives in an adventure rather than be subjected by a system opposed to their beliefs, even if they had to pay a high price.

What powerful forces were present for that distinctive society to seek to live in a country as distant and strange to them as México? In the 1920s Mexico was a country in which armed strife and even banditry persisted in many regions such as Chihuahua state. It was also strongly Catholic, and Mennonites would constitute an undesirable religious, linguistic and ethnical minority. They knew that they would suffer certain perils in this situation, but felt that their traditional wisdom would help. Other forces would help them in any event, and they were right in this perception. In these circumstances, the imperative need of the landowners in Chihuahua (the Zuloagas) to sell their properties, and the Mennonite urgency to escape from an intolerable situation in Canada, helped both parties to reach an agreement. Thus they commenced one of the most impressive colonization schemes in Mexican history. In this process President Álvaro Obregón, a farmer himself, intervened in several ways until the scheme reached its conclusion.³ So the foundation of the Manitoba and Swift Current colonies began, the first and by far the most important Mennonite settlements in the area. When this land proved to be of good quality, more colonies arose. The newly acquired lands

were apt for the kind of agriculture Mennonites practiced, and so prosperity came in a few years.

This *distinctive society* carried to Mexico a religious and cultural heritage that had started in the sixteenth century. Significantly, it was implanted in a completely different environment from that in which Mennonites used to live; a situation that emphasized their singular aspects as members of a religious community. As happened in other regions of their diaspora – Prussia, Russia or Canada — they remained loyal to the principles of their religion, and they rejected racial and cultural mixture in order to avoid their dissolution in a secular context. If we compare them with other minorities in diaspora, such as Jews and Gypsies, traditional Mennonites seem especially strict. In fact, Mexican Mennonites actually don't consider themselves Mexicans, except for the legal aspects of citizenship. Many times I have heard Mennonites say that they were Mennonites, or Canadian, or even "Germans," despite the fact that they were born in Mexico. Sometimes, in order to avoid hostility, they declared themselves as "Mexicans". It is important to point out that typical Mexicans are very proud of their origins. A history of grievances against outsiders makes them extremely suspicious about the intentions of foreigners. In the presence of Mennonites they become ambivalent. The Mexicans often envy the Mennonites because they are hard working people, with superior organizations and capabilities, even though they are "foreigners". In any case, this Mennonite singularity is the first element to consider in a study of their migration trends. Feeling themselves foreigners in their own country gives them a higher motivation than Mexicans to move to other countries. In this case, their devotion to the land of their ancestors is remarkable, and only extreme necessity leads them to look for other places to live. Traditional and non-traditional Mennonites from Cuauhtémoc prefer Canada, a sort of idealized motherland.

Land Scarcity for Mennonites

The original land area acquired by Mennonites was 60,000 hectares for the Manitoba Colony and 40,000 hectares for the Swift Current Colony. The colonies of Ojo de la Yegua and Santa Clara (established in 1946), Jagüeyes (1948) and Santa Rita (end of 1950s) colonies comprise 125,000 hectares. The complete Mennonite area, thus, is 225,000 hectares, yet Mennonite expansion in Mexico has reached its limits at least in the best lands. Demographic growth in the state impeded the acquisition of new lands, and it is clear that global climatic changes have affected Chihuahua in a negative sense.

Recurrent droughts also affected seriously the freatic strata, spoiling the existing wells for irrigation. It is important to look to the increase of the Mennonite population. During the first years of the 1920s, roughly 7,000 Mennonites arrived in Cuauhtémoc, Namiquipa y Riva Palacio. Today the population in northern Mexico is between 35,000 and 38,000 people. Calculations of natural growth without any emigration indicate that there would have been 150,000 people, so an argument can be made that just a fifth of the community remained in Mexico, a situation that reveals an unusual rate of out-migration.⁴ By 2002 an equilibrium between land occupancy and the existing population seemed to have risen, a situation that contrasts with many of the rural communities in Mexico.

The realization that lands can't be divided *ad infinitum* from one generation to another is historically crucial. So Mennonites avoid a common phenomenon in at least half of Mexican agriculture, that is, continued division of the land to a point where agriculture is no longer sustainable. In Mexico it is not unusual to find plots of no more than a half hectare. As any farmer knows this is not enough to raise a family. In the Mennonite case, their migrations have resulted in part from from scarcity of land and this was true not only in Canadá, but also in the United States, Bolivia, Belice, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay. As migration has developed into an historic practice, Mennonites have have readily emigrated from Mexico and their exodus has been significant during the last four decades. During the 1950s there were droughts and a severe decline in agricultural production, situations that were cyclically repeated. In recent times, rains were scarce for an unusual period of seven years, a situation that affected agricultural activities and gave rise to temporary and permanent Mennonite migrations.

Agriculture and cattle-raising are the main traditional Mennonite activities, in plots that average 30 hectares. Corn, wheat, bean, oat, sorghum, sunflower and forage are their main crops. Most of the production is for self-consumption and for regional sale, with the cities of Juárez and Monterrey (marginally) as the limits of their trading region. In this case we see a circumstance that characterizes Mexican agriculture in general. That is to say, the middle and high productivity areas are located an uneconomical distance from the major consumption areas. In the case of irrigation areas near the Pacific, American customers are closer than Mexican ones. Also, Mennonite products have fewer sales advantages. One possible explanation is that in the case of Mennonites (at least in the case of the traditional Mennonites from Cuauhtémoc), economical objectives are subordinated to religious goals. Although the capitalistic ideal is dominant, in this case it is limited by extra-economical

considerations. On the other hand, the prices of their agricultural products are being negatively affected by the free trade with the US and Canada, against whose products the Mexican commodities are not competitive. Some Mennonites produce high quality apples, like Quinta Lupita. Perhaps this activity is the less traditional among the agricultural products of Cuauhtémoc, but it is still severely impacted by Washington State's imports. There also are cooperatives that produce cheese, but this activity has also suffered from the rigidities of old practices. At any rate, there is no Mennonite product that supplies international markets, as in the cases of the horticultural products from Sinaloa and Sonora, Chihuahua's neighbours.⁵

In the past, favorable economic circumstances and a strict work ethic allowed Mennonites to be self-sufficient and they didn't demand anything from the government. But competitive products from outside, and the serious effects of national protectionism changed their situation radically. Most of them rejected agricultural change or the diversification of their activities. They instead decided to accept the official subsidies, the short-term easiest way. Nowadays farmers receive the devolution of direct taxes called IVA, a subsidy commonly called "Procampo" (which originally was designed for the poorest farmers), and Tariff 9 (which allows farmers to pay just a third of the costs of energy). Sometimes these programs lead to illicit situations. A landowner rents his lands to another and he receives the "Procampo" subsidy. This situation is typical among poor farmers who rent their lands to rich corn growers. Sometimes farmers become sharecroppers, with benefits up to 15 to 20% of the crop, and they still receive the Procampo grants. Some farmers prefer to migrate or to seek employment as workers in limited industries such as cheese factories or agricultural parts plants that exist within the Mennonite community. In the past, some Mennonites became members of a movement called "El Barzón o barzonistas" (organized bank debtors, with a high capacity of political action). The complacency of the authorities regarding their demands, as in the case of payment suspension for electric tariffs, has led to corruption among many Mennonites who prefer to undertake political action instead of looking for long-term solutions for their problems. The Credit Union near Cuauhtémoc, established in 1993, has been a serious attempt by a group of progressive Mennonites to unite the community and take advantage of cooperative and associative models as a way to reverse the inconvenient practices that demoralize the traditional Mennonite culture.

Historically speaking, agricultural stagnation in any reasonably advanced society was overcome by the diversification of the economic activities of its members. As a matter of fact, agriculture

appears in all cases as the temporal foundation for other economic activities, such as manufacturing or services. Some people perceive the Mennonite's future as problematic, due to the high resistance of the community as a whole to find new economic activities. Conservative attitudes in their daily life can be observed in their main activities, even though Mennonite agriculture is considered modern in many aspects. Many of them don't understand that in order to improve their incomes in the long run it is necessary to know which are the most lucrative cultivations, those with a high demand not only in the regional or national market, but in the international one. They don't seem to understand the disadvantage of excluding themselves from the changes that take place in the world. Economic diversification is marginal; it is rarely achieved in the most traditional colonies. Low levels of education are responsible for this situation, and religious orthodoxy plays its part in fostering attitudes that operate against a necessary adaptation to the outside world. The Mennonite community needs a better agricultural perspective and professionals of all kinds to solve the complex problems that affect any society.

Rural Sector Crisis

Before going into the subject of the national rural sector, I'd like to refer, in an ample way, to the state of the Mexican economy in recent years. Within a brief transition period that began two decades ago our country passed from economic protectionism to an open economy. Governments had worked with the intention that our country should without reservation be part of the global economy, and for this reason looked favorably on the development of an economic model "towards the outside." Mexico is therefore up to the mark on global processes regarding privatizations, open markets and minimal interventions of the state in the economy. Foreign investments are welcome, without reservations or obstacles that characterized the past. These investments were significant during the Zedillo regime and even more so with President Vicente Fox. These investments when added to the fiscal benefits of oil, stabilized the *peso* and helped to keep inflation at low levels. On the other side of the coin, however, there has been a stagnation of production, low levels of productivity and a significant rate of underemployment. A substantial number of in-bond industries (the so called *maquiladoras* in Spanish) were established on the northern border and beyond, and became an important part of a constant flow of foreign investments, not exclusively from the United States. At this moment, at least half of them have closed their

doors, with serious and worrying effects on regional employment and the other economic sectors in general.

Let us look now at the national agricultural sector. At the end of the 1980s, agriculture was a strategic area for state action, because it provided cheap products for the cities, foodstuffs for many Mexicans and the stability of the producers' incomes. This model required a complex structure of tariff protection to inhibit imports of similar products from the United States. It relaxed only when the internal supply was unable to satisfy the demand. CONASUPO, a governmental enterprise, was the only institution authorized to acquire agricultural products such as corn, beans and other basic products from overseas. This situation reached a limit when the fiscal crisis and the adjustment demands from the international banking system led to the transformation of state policies. With the end of the tariff protection for industry (a sector highly protected), the agricultural sector faced a situation for which it wasn't prepared at all. Liberalization of agricultural trade, the diminution by the state of its functions of regulation and intermediation, bank reforms, privatization of the governmental enterprises that supported the agricultural sector, the suppression of guaranteed prices and other subsidies were the result of the new situation. An important aspect of this transformation was the change in the legal definition of the rural property, because the *ejidos* (a sort of "common" land for the poorest farmers) that enjoyed a particular status, were now allowed to be part of the land market. The purpose of the new model, it was said, was to increase agricultural investments, to invite capitalist farmers not only to provide a bigger food supply for the Mexicans, but to encourage them to export. The net effect of these policies, nevertheless, didn't match the expectations. A decrease in the internal agricultural production brought about a sustained increase of food imports and reductions of farm land for basic foods and cattle assets.⁶ As a result, producers usually stored a surplus that could be sold in the market. If there is a tenuous struggle to maintain afloat in the activity, many rural households are sustained mainly by external incomes of their members who work in distant latitudes, like the big cities and the United States. In terms of the social and political effects of this situation, what is more worrying is that with the dismantling of the state tutelage for the peasants, an uneasy equilibrium has been created in the most backward rural sector. A non-written pact between the government of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) with the peasants and farmers in general consisted in the maintenance of that tutelage, in exchange for their passive support, activated in election periods in the form of the "green vote". When the state quit its support of the peasants, it resulted in a relaxation of the

traditional corporative controls, and with it the fall of the PRI in the national elections of 2000, when the countryside, for the first time in many decades, stopped supplying forced votes in favour of the dominant system. In strictly productive terms, the governmental haste to open national markets and reduce its expenses in support of the agricultural sector prevented a process of reconversion that allowed the foundation of a new long-term sustained project. In particular, there isn't an alternative system to guarantee a better future for the poor peasants.

The Mexican rural sector is now currently going through a critical phase, which in fact means a worsening of the conditions of life. A precarious order is now altered, and despite its problems, allows survival of thousands of farmer and peasant families. Growing subsidized imports of basic staples in the short term mitigates the problems related to the agricultural supply, but inhibits rural development in the long run. In many communities young people emigrate, and old people, women and children stay in the villages and ejidos, distorting a society that exists with the family unity as one of its principles. Many of the emigrants don't come back. In some instances, these people are never seen again and their relatives never again have any news of them.

The Search for a Better Life: Employment and Education

Regarding migration, social and family nets have been decisive in the decision to migrate, as have been the origin of the emigrants, and the destination of their migration. In the case of Mennonites from Cuauhtémoc, their relationships have been evident with other Mennonites, not only in Canada, but also with those who live in other countries. I'd like to speculate regarding the situation that arises when Cuauhtémoc's Mennonites arrive in Canada and try to assimilate into a new and different society. I'm talking about their similarities with East Germans when Germany was reunited. The East Germans lived and were educated in a very different way than their neighbors, so they are still in a process of re-culturation that costs Berlin huge amounts of money. In the case of Mennonites from Mexico, the separation in terms of culture and living with their peers in Canada is even greater, and that means that "assimilation" would be quite a difficult task. Russian Mennonites that recently arrived in Germany, about 100,000, are said to be suffering from a process of assimilation, so the parallels are not difficult to imagine. The key problem is the educational level of the people who arrive in the new society, because education means better conditions for a successful

accommodation. In the case of traditional Mennonites from Cuauhtémoc, whose formal education is quite limited, the only possibility for them is to seek employment as workers in the agricultural, industrial or service sectors. There are a growing number of Mennonites that consider Canada the best place to live and carry out a technical or professional career that implies a long period in the schools. Mennonites from Jagüeyes (Quellen Colony), who are a less traditional group than those closer to Cuauhtémoc, tend to be less opposed to formal education, so they are good example to follow for the other Mennonites. Members of the Mennonite Conference decided on their own to have educational institutions in order to prepare the young people, with an acceptable success rate, because their students have a multilingual and multicultural approach that allows them to accommodate themselves in the Mexican, Canadian and American environments. Most Mennonites emigrate for economic reasons, but in a number of cases, educational factors are paramount.

Regarding this phenomenon we should mention the strictly temporary migration, which is entirely linked to the desire for better incomes. Mennonites from Cuauhtémoc, mainly the poor ones, stay temporarily in Canada during the “hot” seasons, working in different trades, as field pickers or urban factory workers. They return home during the cold seasons, staying with their families in the milder weather in Mexico, so they avoid inconvenience related to cold weather, as well the associated expenses of heating. It is expected that after a temporary residence in Canada young people will compare the two environments and the different possibilities that each one offerers them, including instruction in a wide range of careers or trades. A promising world is offered to them. Temporary residences could be the first step toward emigration. The prospect of living in the *campos* of Cuauhtémoc for many young Mennonites will then not be attractive any more, because they don't have a reason for doing so, except one, that one dictated by orthodoxy and tradition. On the other hand, a mass exodus (quite improbable, in my opinion) of young Mennonites would severely hamper the regional economy, because land was worked and divided according to the needs and circumstances of the Mennonite community. We don't see any feasible alternative to Mennonite agriculture in the region.

In the 1920s, Mexican governments allowed the establishment of the Mennonite colonies on the condition that the new immigrants would be engaged exclusively in agriculture. This was the reason behind the acceptance of the Mennonites from Canada rather than from Russia. Russian Mennonites were not only farmers, but had a highly diversified occupational structure, that included merchants, industrialists and professionals in different fields. As a matter of fact,

for many years virtually all *Altkoloniers* were farmers, living in economic complementarity with the surrounding Mexican society. They visited Cuauhtémoc for business reasons, and to get professional services from accountants, doctors and even lawyers. Now we find non-traditional Mennonites involved in different activities, from industry to agriculture, but we don't see quite the same situation with *Altkoloniers*. In this traditional economic diversification is at a relatively low level, and it is related to the low educational levels of its members.

In the Mennonite traditional schools only subjects are studied that are considered important for the daily life of the community and the performance of usual activities – arithmetic, German language and religion. For this reason the curriculum is practically void of many subjects, hampering the chances for young Mennonites to carry on further studies. It also doesn't allow them to carry on further studies, at the technical or university levels. Orthodoxy doesn't want to take any risks. Its position is that books will contribute to making Mennonites worldly, offering them only the destiny of self-annihilation as Mennonites, because they will be tempted to modify their lives apart from what is considered "right" in terms of their religion. And this, they contend, will result in their expulsion or self-expulsion from their community. Their logic is clear: either the community remains the same, according to immutable patterns, or the community ventures forth on uncertain paths where the historical-religious Mennonite faith is dangerously put at risk. But it is clear that orthodox uniformity is impossible in the real world, as it is seen in Cuauhtémoc, or it's been seen in the Mennonite Diaspora. Dissident persons or groups emerge as a result of this dispersion. These groups do not necessarily renounce their Mennonite faith, but form new communities. They live according to what they consider modern life. They are willing to embrace the possibilities of new activities including education and life styles. They break the pattern that traps traditional Mennonites, but they accept, with considerable success, the risks of living inside a society which is still very different.

Problems of Drugs and Alcohol

For at least four decades Mexico has been an exporting country for marijuana, and more recently a transit territory for cocaine from South America. Chihuahua, for its part, is now an important state for these activities because of its extended deserts and woods, its low density population and its proximity to the United States. Attacks on narcotics in the traditional sanctuary of drug trafficking in the north,

specifically in Sinaloa, moved illegal activities to Chihuahua during the seventies. This geographic “diversification” led to the creation of new routes in different parts of Chihuahua. Favored by a protective structure that sprang from the national, regional and local levels of government, drug dealers established themselves solidly in the state, creating cartels like the powerful Ciudad Juárez group. Very soon Chihuahua registered a growing consumption of drugs. And the drug culture was established, despite its consequences of violence, as an alternative “easy and pleasant life” for young people. Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, a small city in a strategic position because it is near the Sierra, in the center of the Mennonite colonies and close to Chihuahua City, soon was an important goal for drug trafficking. Drug consumption rose here, and money laundering is flourishing even today. It is not an exaggeration to say that millions of dollars are exchanged by pesos every day, a situation that causes an important flow of uncontrolled money, and subsequently, a persistent inflation there. Some Mennonites have been involved in drug consumption, drug dealing and laundering of money. Severe addiction to drugs isn't rare.

It is well known that professional drug dealers invite some Mennonites to perform the job of transporting drugs from one point to another, mainly to the border city of El Paso, Texas. It is important to mention that this unfortunate situation has become common. Traditionally, Mennonites have visited the American border very frequently, in order to get products and machinery for their homes and work. As we know, they are a hard working people, who with their simple appearance possess features of order and morality that make them a trustworthy people. American and Mexican customs and migration officers used to give Mennonites, for those reasons, special deferential treatment. But drug dealers took advantage of and misused this situation, and the fact that some of the Mennonites would be willing to collaborate with them, due in most cases to their astonishing candor: “Take this package with you to the United States and we will pay for it. There isn't any risk and you will be generously paid; soon you will have a new truck.” Several times the trick worked, but then a group of Mennonites were caught at the border and sent to jail, with severe penalties. In the penitentiary center of Ciudad Juárez there are now at least fifteen Mennonites accused of drug trafficking.⁷

Aside from drugs there is the growing problem of alcoholism that affects young people most of all. A gradual relaxing of the traditions among some Mennonites has also led them to accept alcohol consumption, just as Mexicans usually do. It is important to note that alcoholism is a severe problem of public health in Mexico and Chihuahua isn't an exception. The work ethic and lifestyle austerity,

two pillars of the Mennonite community, are now unbearable for some of their members who consider themselves suffocating in this rural and isolated atmosphere. Many young people find few alternatives because they don't practice sports or read books, except the religious ones. They don't escape from a universal phenomenon that sociologists call the "demonstration effect," that is, the imagining of a modern and pleasant life very close to their hands, a mirage transmitted by the means of communication, especially television. Mennonite parents and authorities often have severe problems in maintaining traditional controls over their youngsters. One of the results, in extreme cases, is the expulsion or resignation of members from the community. The fear from the elders is that if the youths stay within Mexican society, they will accept as permanent the vices or bad behaviour that motivated their exodus in the first place. The problem in particular is again linked to the low level of educational and cultural background. For the Mennonites, adaptation to the Mexican habits and customs are extremely difficult, making the establishment of a family with Mexican women especially difficult. Gradually, they will be compelled to forget their origins, and perhaps they will be ashamed of them. It is convenient to remember that Mexican society isn't a model of egalitarianism between races. Some Mexicans practice discrimination and make tasteless jokes about Mennonites, depicting them as "inferior people." To conclude this point, we should note in summary that alcoholism and drug addiction are undesirable manifestations of the worldliness that are opposite to the way of life of the Mennonite community. As a result, it is not difficult to understand that older Mennonites consider that Canada offers them a better environment, and that they should encourage migration from Cuauhtémoc far to the north.

Final Words

This brief paper has dealt with the reasons behind the temporary and permanent migration of Mennonites from Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, to Canada, noting that the reasons are not just of an economic character, but that other elements are also present. Now we can speculate about a situation that could occur in the case of a massive exodus of the traditional Mennonites from Mexico to Canada. In this unlikely scenario, we should include two factors: the disposition of the provincial and federal governments of Canada in allowing the "resettlement" by reestablishing privileges such as those given to the Mennonites in the nineteenth century and the availability of suitable lands. The land problem is particularly acute because

Canada nowadays doesn't have territories to colonize, except the ones in the northern limits of agriculture, places where making a living is complicated. In fact, it is doubtful that they could find any other country willing to replicate conditions that existed in past times, like those which once existed in Canada, Mexico or the United States. The global demographic growth that affects all the countries of the world seems to make it impossible to repeat an experience like that of the Mennonites. We might even suggest that the era of group migrations has ended forever. We can assume that migrations will continue, but these will be migrations of individuals, and in terms of numbers will not greatly affect the communities from which they originate. If we are wrong, and if a mass Mennonite migration should become possible from the Cuauhtémoc area to some other place, we, in Mexico, will face a disaster with far-reaching consequences.

Notes

- ¹ I appreciate very much the invitation that Dr. Roy Loewen extended me to attend to this important conference. My gratitude is double because I'm not Mennonite, Canadian or even Germanic, but a Mexican scholar who is very interested in Mennonite questions. For my entire life I wanted to know more about the Canadian Mennonites, how they lived and even how they looked, compared with their brothers in Mexico. So, this is an important moment for me, a sort of realized dream. I apologize beforehand for my deficiencies in expressing myself in English, but I'm sure we will understand each other. I also express my thanks to my good friends Dr. Karl Koth, from Okanagan College, Kelowna, and Dr. Dudley Ankerson for his kind commentaries about this paper.
- ² Harry Leonard Sawatsky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1971, p. 28
- ³ Castro, Pedro. *Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua: crónica de su fundación*. México: Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA)-Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa. 2000, p. 56
- ⁴ Interview with Pedro Rempel, 26 December 2001
- ⁵ México. Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación (SAGARPA). ASERCA. "Descripción del Sector Agroalimentario y Características del Medio Rural". Diciembre 2001, p. 57
- ⁶ Calva, José Luis. "La reforma económica de México y sus impactos en el sector agropecuario", in Philippe Bovin (comp). *El Campo Mexicano: una modernización a marchas forzadas*. México: Centro Francés de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos. 1996, pp. 31-32
- ⁷ Interview with Pedro Rempel, 26 December 2001