

On the Way to Living Globally

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The following personal reflections, presented in November 2013 at an Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) mission and peace colloquium hosted by Ted Koontz, were part of a series he and I had sponsored in recent years, by inviting senior persons to reflect on how they had been changed in thinking and living. I of course said yes to Ted's request, but that did not mean I was ready for reflection, or had gained sufficient distance from the experience. The fact of my official retirement in 2012 is still too fresh, and my 'to do' list still too long, for me to offer broad reflections on my life and ministry in peace and mission matters.

In the last issue of *Mission Focus: Annual Review* (2012) that I edited, I included a paper I presented to the 2011 Council of International Ministries (CIM) consultation on ministry in Eurasia entitled "Serious Mission Partners in Eastern Europe: Reflections on 20 Years of Post-Communism." That paper actually addressed general missiology issues for the same time period, so I have avoided repeating myself in what follows. It may be a better clue to why Anabaptist vision, post-Christendom, anti-Constantinianism, or a peace theology applied only through the church barely surface here — those frames of reference were never central to the Mennonite legacy I am speaking from.²

At the presentation I introduced several display items to stimulate imaginations, starting with a Russian wooden doll popular in 1988, which showed then USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev, inside whom was Leonid Brezhnev, inside whom was Nikita Khrushchev, inside whom was Josef Stalin, inside whom was Vladimir Lenin, and at the heart of it all was Karl Marx — a vi-

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2 The north European Anabaptist movement I am referring to here, most specifically its Russian Mennonite expressions (1789-1989), I described elsewhere as one of the many faces of Anabaptism in mission. In a chapter of Andrew Klager's forthcoming *Historical Seeds of Mennonite International Peacebuilding* (Wipf & Stock), my focus is on that tradition's peace legacy. See also my "Menn. Mission und Missionstheologie", in the revised "Mission," Band 2 ([http://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=top:mision&cs\[\]=missionstheologie](http://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=top:mision&cs[]=missionstheologie), 2013).

sualized legacy then being set to one side, but still a legacy with a continuing impact. Andrei Rublev's famous icon of the Trinity often served me as presence in class to help us think of the relationality of God Father, God Son, and God Holy Spirit, and for a free church audience such as a Mennonite one, to make us more aware of our over focus on Christology — often I asked when last someone had concluded a prayer with the formula “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen” — virtually always used by Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants alike in the Slavic world.

Indeed, at the time of the celebration of the millennium of Christianity in Slavic lands, widely circulated copies of Ilya Glazunov's 100 Centuries painting served to tell the story. Reading that painting became a lesson in modern ways of seeing/reading an icon. Glazunov's first version of 1988 conveyed a persistent pacifist theme, centered on the innocent Tsarevich and a devuchka (young girl), and even Leo Tolstoy stood at the culminating end of a long row of political cultural leaders, Tolstoy wearing a placard spelling out “nonresistance” to make the point (Image 1) . But only five years later, in a chastened version about the dramatic transformations, the eye was drawn to the young man, now holding a gun, and the innocent girl now his admiring supporter, while our eyes noticed the virtually naked woman dancer, plus shady politicians and business types dealmaking, while in a little bubble Glazunov's self-portrait appeared as the innocent wondering what went so badly wrong (Image 2) . What follows relies on scholarship which set me thinking, but those visual images serve as imagination triggers to remember that lived realities in constant change are the legacy we convey in spite of ourselves.

The Osmosis of Childhood

My mind was often changed on the way to learning to live globally. A few “aha” moments may be of interest to Mennonite readers. I am also trying not to repeat remarks from several other more ceremonial events at the time of my retirement in 2012.³

First I must begin with a deep sense of thankfulness for my immediate family. Already on my way to Goshen College in 1965, I knew that I would buy an engagement ring in order to propose to Margaret at Christmas time back in Winnipeg. We were married in the summer of 1966 just before returning for my final year at Goshen for a degree in history. It was the first of three rounds

³ More detail to make sense of briefer remarks here come through in chapters by John A. Lapp and N. Gerald Shenk about my career, as published in Mary Raber and Peter F. Penner, eds., *History and Mission in Europe: Continuing the Conversation* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2011).

of obtaining an American visa, the first the easiest, even though Margaret had to work for cash as cleaning staff at the college, while also taking some courses. The next time around was in 1985 when we obtained visas for Margaret and me, not for our daughter Natasha who had been born in Minneapolis during grad school days, but for our son Alex who had been born in London, England. The three of us repeated that waiting game in 1990. Thankfully there was an immigration amnesty so by 1991 we had started part two of my ministry life as seminary professor and East–West consultant for MCC.⁴ Thereafter both children married, both having graduated from Goshen College, then received advanced degrees, and now there are five grandchildren, a boy and girl for Alex and his wife Wendi, a boy, a girl, and a baby for Natasha and her husband Aaron Kingsley. Along the way both children also spent time in other countries as we had imagined our own overseas experience had preprogrammed them, but now are settled in Goshen and Winnipeg — two crucial shaping locations for our lives.

I always knew myself as born into a peoplehood, part of the Russian Mennonites who had immigrated to Canada and USA two generations before me, and as part of smaller Mennonite denominations who had split over the pace of spiritual renewal (as they understood it) or the pace of cultural adaptation that I became more aware of as a historian with a social theory minor. My maternal grandfather, Wilhelm H. Falk, was already elected a minister in the Sommerfelder Mennonite community, before he began listening to Mennonite Brethren and General Conference revival preachers, and someone from the Salvation Army. So he experienced a personal conversion, or at least a renewal of an owned piety that transformed his preaching and his desire for a more missionally oriented church. Things came to a head in 1937 when the Sommerfelder leaders rejected him and three other like-minded preachers, so at a subsequent gathering in the village of Rudnerweide they organized the Rudnerweider Mennonite Church, with Falk as the bishop. My father's conversion from the Sommerfelder, where his father had been a respected chorister, had resulted in his baptism by the bishop of the Bergthaler Mennonites, who had separated from the Sommerfelder in an earlier renewal about fifty years earlier. But he fell in love with Bishop Falk's daughter, transferred his membership upon marriage, and within a year was elected minister. It turned out that my father was among the first ministers to move to the city of Winnipeg, where he organized a congregation for other young families leaving the farm for wage earning in

⁴ From January 1990 to August 1991 I commuted between Elkhart and Winnipeg, since the seminary suddenly needed my classes, and the family stayed in Winnipeg until normal immigration was possible.



Image 1. Ilya Glazunov. *Eternal Russia*, 1988. *Canvas, oil. 3 x 6 meters. Photograph provided by the author.*



Image 2. Ilya Glazunov. *Russia, Awaken!*, 1994.
Canvas, oil. 4 x 2.5 meters. Photograph provided by the author.

the city. A dozen years later, having fostered the formation of a conference structure with program boards, etc. my father decided to leave Winnipeg, in order to finish a BA (in history it turned out, with John A. Lapp the primary teacher) at EMU in 1970, when I was already in grad school doing European and Russian history. When he returned to Winnipeg, even though he had been widely respected and loved as pastor and conference president, that conference did not offer him a position, worried how education might have changed him. Several years later, after he had survived running a hardware store and taught at Steinbach Bible College, he became the first conference minister for that same Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) — another innovation.

That may be more background data than necessary, but it is my way of saying how much I was shaped by osmosis. I never learned to think of ministers and bishops as different from farmers and workers in work clothes, and the many visitors to our house brought their worlds to our table. At our house we talked church, we talked church renewal, we talked mission vision and peacemaking. When my father returned from a trip to the West Indies, the most important line I remembered was his discovery that missionaries were people too, who engaged in petty conflicts and needed outside counsel. I also got the message to study as long as I could — my grandfather's interest in the world, my father's curiosity in new things became a legacy for me. It was surely many years later as scholar and teacher where I more self-consciously rated a capacity for curiosity as essential for ministry, a mindset that expects change and tries to make sense of it.

Changed by Continuous Rethinking of Theology and History

In hindsight I also remember the fear, particularly of being changed fundamentally by more schooling. That first Christmas break from Goshen College in 1965, I attended a meeting of the EMMC Christian Education Commission, where a high-school teacher, with whom I had often shared such meetings earlier, asked whether I was the same Walter, or had college changed me. "It is the same Walter," I said, not only lying but also wondering how he as educator could frame his question that way. That year I had indeed taken a course in sociology of religion that had been transformative.⁵ Ever since I have followed the progressions of Peter Berger's thinking about faith, having wrestled deeply with his *Invitation to Sociology* book, and its section on role theory. I have

⁵ The course, taught by J. Richard Burkholder, his first time I discovered later, plus another the next year by new professor Theron Schlabach provided the blessing of their new thinking (and watching their later development as friend and colleague) to set me on a path of regular rethinking.

watched other students get caught up in the Enlightenment enthusiasm, like philosophes of the 1700s, only two or more centuries too late, and then not getting past that enthusiasm for the rational. My getting to a nevertheless of faith, after wrestling with relativity theory, and the scholastic hubris of thinking one can understand religion and faith phenomenologically, helped me to pursue my curiosities about Marxism — the early theory, its role in Russian intellectual history, and its degeneration when it became official bureaucratic socialism — then to agonize with a brilliant philosopher in the Institute of American Studies (Moscow) who was active in peace matters. He could no longer respect his daughter who had become a conformist official Marxist to get ahead with her career, and instead he envied his son, who had encountered Orthodoxy through priests like Fr. Alexander Men — a man of deep, simple faith, but widely read intellectually — and was now risking his career by coming out as Christian. Yet in spite of his goodwill, and the experience of his youth as exchange student through Brethren Christian Service, he still felt unable personally to make the leap of faith existentially. Within six months of that conversation, he died of a sudden heart attack. My college time leap of faith experience at the same time allowed me, without a sense of inauthentic posing, to enter fully into the fervent faith of the Russian Evangelicals — the old Babushki who blessed every youth showing up for worship — and to discover very savvy urbanites and intellectuals in that same church, who were wishing for opportunities to talk over their faith issues, including how to respond to Orthodox seekers from the intelligentsia.⁶

The primary peoplehood shaping for me was to learn the Mennonite story. It was the story of a pilgrim people, who had been forced to move for conscience' sake. Among vague early memories are hearing C. F. Klassen and his brother-in-law Peter J. Dyck report on the postwar refugees. Whether to immigrate or to stay was always part of the conversation, because some had been rescued from the Communist threat, and others were living or losing their faith under persecution pressures. I also learned the story of the Mennonites from books, first in German, then I recall reading and discussing G. H. Williams' *Radical Reformation* tome with my father. Throughout, what began to disturb me more deeply was the way the Russian Mennonite story, indeed the

⁶ Two decades later I discovered that a number of those young Evangelicals had experimented with becoming Orthodox (Fr. Men's group and the seminary in Zagorsk), then returning to the Baptist Union after discovering Orthodoxy's shadow sides, but retaining friendships and common reformist commitments. One Mennonite, Vasili Fast, stayed Orthodox and became a priest and theology teacher, while his brother emerged as a key leader of Mennonite Brethren in Kazakhstan.

Anabaptist–Mennonite story, was told from an insider perspective, and was far too idealized compared to what I knew about those people. So when I settled for historical studies, my initial intention was to find the sources for a fuller Mennonite story, to grasp its light and shadow sides.

Among the serendipities of my time in graduate school was the fact that a fellow Canadian Mennonite, Lawrence Klippenstein, chose to focus on Mennonite pacifism in Russia, and that my doctoral adviser, Dr. Theofanis Stavrou, caused my Christian history understandings to expand to new terrain. He liked to describe himself as one born and raised in Cyprus, who did not become an Orthodox priest as expected, but through the Presbyterian missionaries came to USA, where he married an evangelical Presbyterian and began to learn Protestant ways, and to teach us with religious sensitivity. For a time there were ten doctoral students, all working on dissertations connected in some way to the Orthodox East — a very rare religious studies focus in Russian studies at the time.⁷ Throughout my life, not only have I retained close fellowship as historian and as Christian with Theofanis Stavrou, but also with many of those doctoral students, and with a few others from other universities, who have been my colleagues in nineteenth- and twentieth-century religious studies ever since. They included Baltic and Swedish Lutherans, Ruthenian Uniates, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Methodists and Baptists — all comparing those traditions within the Russian Orthodox milieu of what has long been a multi-confessional empire.

I soon realized that focusing on Mennonite history for a dissertation would not adequately unlock the keys to the impact of the Russian setting. It was formative not only because it allowed a fleshing out of early Dutch Anabaptist ideals, but also the Orthodox ethos, the type of state formation within which the Russian Mennonites were essentially the first to develop a spectrum of institutions for ministry and mission, and the surrounding sectarian world influenced them. So I began reading about the sectarian traditions, a research area only recently getting serious attention. But in order to understand the state officials, and their operative theologies, it was obviously necessary to study the history of Russian Orthodoxy. That too was, and largely still remains, an inadequately researched subject. That is truly sad for the West, as well as for the Russians themselves, because it involves a story of centuries of suffering under Muslim dominance, then enlightened despots' aping of the West through subordination

⁷ My dissertation, titled "Prince Alexander N. Golitsyn (1773–1844): Tsarist Minister of Piety," unpublished (University of Minnesota, 1976), was essentially focused on the impact of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Pietist movement on Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions, on Tsarist administrative and educational history.

of Orthodox structures to the modernizing state, and most recently the Soviet experiment that resulted in millions of martyrdoms. If there had ever been any sense of the Mennonites having suffered more than others for their faith, a notion I still encounter rather often, those exposures to a bigger world and its longer story forced me to differentiate more carefully.

Immersed in a Bipolar World

In the early 1970s, North American Christians, including Mennonites, were in tension over whether to support the underground church in the USSR, or the official church. Peter Dyck, then MCC Europe director, learned of a new Centre for the Study of Religion under Communism, based in south London, and visited it. He liked the fact that they were trying to collect data on the whole spectrum of religious life, and were avoiding partisanship even though the director, Michael Bourdeaux, had published books on the dissident Baptists and their leader, Georgy Vins. Soon after Peter Dyck came to visit us in Minneapolis, having learned from his brother, C. J. Dyck, then on the MCC board, that I was finishing a degree in Russian history. So on behalf of MCC he invited us to go to London, England, as an MCC-sponsored research scholar. We intended to serve for three years, which stretched to twelve, nine of them in Germany, from where it was easier to do oral history interviews with recent immigrants and to travel to Eastern Europe and the USSR. As that evolved, we became convinced of the necessity to cross the East–West barrier for the sake of peace, to design programs that placed students in East European settings. So crossing the East–West border for the sake of encouraging persons bearing Christian witness in settings of societal and state hostility to Christians and to other religions turned out to be a long-term ministry, and a long-term learning experience. Much of this we were able to do openly, but without publicity, with the negative result that the supporting constituency was less stimulated to walk with us.⁸

My appointment, and several events soon after, caused me to realize the extent of the culture war Mennonites were caught up in. I was soon treated as a fellow leader to help us navigate the tricky terrain. If my work involved drawing attention to violations of religious rights, tracking the persons imprisoned for reasons of Christian conscience, and making this public, then part of

⁸ That is the central critique in Mark Jantzen, “Tenuous Bridges over the Iron Curtain: Mennonite Central Committee Work in Eastern Europe from 1966 to 1991,” *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 18 (2010): 70–90. The article describes many varieties of bridging experience, but did not address the longer story with reference to the USSR, which is probably a central red line in the MCC story till about 2000.

my church community treated me as right wing anti-Communist; when my work involved researching and writing about the officially tolerated Christians, Orthodox included, or to participate in religious and secular peace congresses, then another part of my church community treated me as a socialist liberal. Since this partisanship was also something I encountered among church leaders and educated scholars, I became much more sensitized to how much societal prejudices shape our churchly thinking.

Throughout my time as primarily MCC scholar and administrator, there was always some form of accountability group with whom I met. During virtually every trip to North America, a roomful of Mennonite leaders would meet with me in Winnipeg, Canada, or in Akron, PA, or in Chicago at Council of International Ministries meetings, or on special speaking trips to California and the Canadian west. Always, one group would be anxious not to cause trouble to relatives still in the USSR, warning us not to be too gullible about East European peace overtures, whereas another group pushed for more human and religious rights advocacy, and more testing of ways to have a ministry of presence in Eastern Europe.

As my role evolved into a more explicit church ambassador role, I spent much more time with European Mennonite leaders seeking ways for shared initiatives. After a decade I began to sense that I was noticing their ways of thinking better, coming to know and appreciate the deep differences that were the fruit of national reshaping as French, Swiss, German, and Dutch Mennonites. My language facility had improved too — I was catching more of the nuances, the body language even. The deepest gradual reshaping of my thinking was to realize how often I now asked myself why these Mennonites, or the Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox with whom I was involved in peace initiatives, were still Christian. All cultural and societal trends seemed to be contrary to Christianity, and the Germans in particular had developed a profound sense of betrayal by the state church institutions which had submitted to the pagan idolatry of National Socialism. To be Christian there was a deliberate choice.

I began noticing and reading more about the reemergence of a people's church from below, the type of people who then showed up in the thousands (and still do so) in annual church days (*Kirchentag*) during Pentecost weekend. Sitting on simple cardboard boxes, hunched together in small groups over morning Bible study, listening to theological sermons where the issues of the day were addressed prophetically, and talking through the many service opportunities offered to them in a market of opportunities, or taking in some seminar, plus evening mass meetings with major speeches, were also for Mar-

garet and me a spiritual refreshing. Today Catholics and Protestants take turns organizing and hosting what is now an ecumenical church weekend. That also caused me to see the much larger real living church than our rhetoric here in America about a secularized Europe allows for, since that usually serves to dismiss them. Later, in a similar way, I began to filter out the statistics chatter about Christianity moving south, about a global church in the South, in order to see better what local and specific forms authentic Christianity was actually taking. That matters more than the numbers.

The Fear Factor

In November 1979, when President Reagan's anti-Communist belligerence and election victory resulted in renewed Cold War suspicions, several members of the MCC executive board, who had been in Germany for an inter-Mennonite consultation on the future of MCC work in Europe, traveled with me through the corridor to Berlin. We passed through a checkpoint in the Berlin wall in order to participate in a seminar with Gossner Mission pastors and theologians in East Berlin. On our way back, once through Checkpoint Charlie and back on the U Bahn train, those leaders began to relax, and laugh at jokes in a near giddy fashion, as if we were going home from a bar. A bit later, when that board debated at length, then approved a continued East–West program that included placing persons in East Germany among other things, Peter Dyck sent me a tape recording of the debate and decision moment. What struck me was the nervous laughter once again, as if we were going to stick our finger in the Soviet nose, were doing something daring that parts of the constituency would worry about. I had always avoided using the phrase Iron Curtain, or Iron Curtain countries, but after listening to the tittering, I began wondering which side was really behind the Iron Curtain. Over the past two decades, the conviction has grown that although the East took down not only the Berlin wall, but also other forms of Iron Curtain separation, I have been living and teaching in a country still imprisoned in fear behind the Iron Curtain. Is such fear a good thing for Americans, or at least for Christian Americans, who, one would think, were trusting in God? Can we learn to love the “enemy” from a position of fear?

This calls to mind personal moments of anxiety and fear, a chain of experiences that caused me to have more sympathy with Soviet and East European border officials who thought I was dangerous. On my first extended stay in the USSR (1973), among my first tasks was to locate and visit places of Christian worship, especially the evangelical Christian Baptist congregations that were often on the outskirts. No information service could or would give me the address or telephone number. After the service at the good-sized congregation

in Leningrad, several younger persons walked me back to the bus stop. Not long after, I noticed the usual raincoat and hat type following me at a distance. In Moscow at the Baptist headquarters, the Mennonite staff member, Viktor Kriger, quickly told me with his eyes that there were ears (or recording devices) behind the curtains, and proposed that we go for a walk in the crisp sunshine. Even then, we switched to Low German dialect, and kept a lookout as we talked. Many years later I stumbled upon official reports (in state archives) to the authorities about such foreign visitors. I published one of them as part of a similar event from 1980 that reported a Mennonite World Conference visit to Alma-Ata (now Almaty), Kazakhstan, of Paul Kraybill, the general secretary, and Walter Sawatsky as the specialist. The closing lines of that report, sent from the official in Kazakhstan to Moscow, were to advise them to limit the influence of Sawatsky because he was encouraging the young people in their religious activities. As some may know, I became *de facto persona non grata* for seven long years, reduced to making contacts with Baptist leaders via a proxy or by meeting them at events in the West.⁹

I noticed two things through these experiences. My background knowledge told me that the state persecution had deeply frightened older leaders who returned from prison rather cowed, whereas a newer generation was accustomed to the setting, and tended to think that if one activity was forbidden, what were alternative options to explore. They were much less shaped by fear, rather by hope.

On that Kazakhstan trip, Jakob Doerksen from Kyrgyzstan told me things even the files later discovered by Johannes Dyck did not convey. A week or so before my letter to Mennonite and Baptist leaders in Kyrgyzstan reached them, informing them of our visit to Alma-Ata and our hope that they might meet us, the KGB had called Doerksen in to say that he was forbidden to go to the meeting with Sawatsky in Alma-Ata. Doerksen said he knew nothing about it, but managed to elicit enough data to know the precise dates, and declared that there was no law against visiting friends in Kazakhstan. To play safe, he had slipped out of his workplace by a rear door, took the car he had hidden nearby, and drove all night to see me at the hotel the next morning. When he returned home, the authorities again interrogated him for eight hours. This he told me some years later when he had immigrated to Germany, and came to visit at our home. I apologized for the trouble I had caused him, but he waved it away, saying that the opportunity for fellowship with Mennonites from abroad

9 See Walter Sawatsky, "Glimpses Behind the Curtain — Surveillance and Pressure during Church Delegation Visits," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 32, no. 4 (November 2012): 41–46.

was worth it.

So what reason did I have to fear the authorities, who could easily keep me for interrogation, or confiscate my papers (as happened several times), but then my foreign passport guaranteed my relative security? Reflecting on those Soviet times now, I am saddened, because of my painful awareness that those same 50,000 or more Soviet Mennonite Evangelicals — who at great personal risk had kept seeking fellowship with the global Mennonite world — after having immigrated to Germany in the early 1990s — refused to join the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) because it seemed alien; they no longer trusted its leadership. It tells us that the careful balancing between left- and right-wing sentiments in our Mennonite worlds, too easily swayed by current American culture wars, is not working well enough. We need a greater capacity for seeing from their point of view. We need a greater capacity to stop assuming that we in America own and define what makes one Mennonite and Christian, before global church relations can go deeper.

The 1989 Surprise?

A year or so before my visa to go to the USSR (January 1988) finally came through, I was watching television coverage of Pope John Paul II's second visit to Poland. I marveled less at the reality of the trip, or at the Pope's speeches to the youth, than at the journalists who still lacked the vocabulary and religious imagination to make sense of what was happening. Hence "everyone" was surprised when the nonviolent revolutions of 1989 came about. To see it actually happening, to experience the euphoria of reunifications in Germany, or the peaceful ending of the attempted coup in Moscow when the women talked the soldiers into refusing to shoot on the people, were indeed times for deep emotion, for saying this is unbelievable, or even that there must be an angel somewhere. But to careful observers and participants, the changes were happening long before already.

Another moment of surprise for me, instead, was to do a presentation to the Mennonite Historical Society in Goshen in 1986, where I described the developments since the crushing of Solidarity in 1981, using Jonathan Schell's references to the "politics of decency" in Czechoslovakia and Poland, and to realize that my listeners were responding in disbelief. They might have been teaching the way of pacifism, but at some deep level had accepted the greater realism of nuclear power — they could not imagine how its actual use had become impotent as an instrument of foreign policy. Since those days, I have wished for more careful attention to political, social, and cultural developments around the world, and less deference to the peaceful and democratic claims of the American Government, and more attention to the actual policies of repres-

sion, and now outright torture of our government. We have remained largely quiescent along with the majority of our society.

So a major turning point for me has been our former reliance on the global cultural framework of human rights expectations, that once gave Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch their journalistic clout and negotiating capacity, but our country's need for security against an announced terror threat (which is different from an actual threat commensurate with the kinds of state response to "global terrorism") has us deferring to our people's fears. The violation of rights argument has been blunted; how can we as Americans raise it in an appeal to do the decent thing, to stop the torture and release the political and religious prisoners, when the perpetrators are us? Indeed, it is difficult to recall when Mennonite mission leaders focused consultation time on the problem of doing authentic mission when we are so deeply associated with America's global dominance.

Elusive Road to Mutuality

One day as I was speaking in a group discussion session at a Church and Peace conference in Germany, I heard myself contrasting the peace churches with the war churches. No one corrected me, presumably out of courtesy, but I have no memory of the rest of that conversation. How could I be so arrogant to claim the high road for the "peace churches" (knowing how poorly we have lived that peace witness) and suggest the others were the war churches? Does any Christian tradition truly see a mandate to make war and its requisite killing of enemies, whenever lectionary reading of Romans 12 or Matthew 5 comes around? Soon after I was invited to speak about Mennonite peacemaking experiences to a north German association of Protestant clergy, only to discover in the coffee time that the majority of those present were pacifists because of their reading of the New Testament, possibly shaped by Bonhoeffer's writings, or those of Martin Niemoeller. They might be the only peace Christian in their parish, and had to tread circumspectly, but people noticed how their convictions showed in the local initiatives they fostered and they signaled their appreciation.

It reminded me of my first encounter with Hans Adolf Hertzler, of Krefeld, pastor of the then largest Mennonite church in Germany, with a membership of a thousand, even though on an average Sunday only forty or fifty were present. I knew of Hertzler as a scholar with a doctorate in Anabaptist studies. He stated that in light of the two previous pastors, each with forty years of ministry — one a Lutheran with Lutheran two kingdoms theology, and the other a Lutheran theologically — he had given himself twenty-five years to work toward the goal of once again becoming a peace church, that Krefeld church which in 1683 had sent its first immigrants to USA in order to avoid

military service. I got to watch him work over the next few years, noticed how carefully he listened, how seldom he spoke but how he encouraged others to do so. Although since then I have been in the USA for nearly thirty years, I keep noticing what comes out of that Krefeld church through its members. So what makes a church a peace church? Talking a good line is seldom more than a superficial answer.

Since 1978 I have been attending the annual meetings of the Council of International Ministries (CIM), a gathering of mission and MCC program executives from at least thirteen Mennonite denominations. At times we managed to host delegates from Latin America, or from Europe, and at the Mennonite World assemblies since 1978 there has usually been a prefatory gathering of mission representatives from around the world. At such a preparatory meeting in 1975 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, there was much talk about deepening partnerships around the world. It was the time when various mission societies — such as the Latin American Mission, or the Church Missionary Society, or the United Bible Societies — experimented with more globally mutual forms of decision making and financing. So the code word thereafter has been “mutuality” in mission. At subsequent CIM gatherings Bob Ramseyer, as director of AMBS’s Mission Training Center, presented papers seeking to spell out what mutuality in mission could mean, how to restructure ourselves toward it. I recall my own enthusiasm for working in that direction, since the MCC style still was to see itself as working on behalf of all Mennonites and related bodies, including some of the Amish, and not needing to dominate and polish its image, but to give visibility to the smaller church entities. I say still was, because by the time of the New Wineskins review process after about 2002, it seemed as if key staff and board members were not acquainted with that history. That is a quick way of saying how many complicating factors can arise as staff transitions take place, or board members get elected who came with good will and no background.

The CIM process of regional program reviews and general meetings to keep abreast of some of the trends in missiological thinking was somewhat effective as an accountability body.¹⁰ By 2000 however, the level of constituency support

10 In two pamphlet-length articles, Wilbert Shenk provided a historical review, including key documents: *An Experiment in Interagency Cooperation* (Elkhart, IN: Council of International Ministries, 1986); *God’s New Economy: Interdependence and Mission* (Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus Pamphlet, 1988). More recent articles in *Mission Focus* addressed some later developments in inter-Mennonite mission cooperation; but given my own participation, I still sense an obligation to attempt a review and assessment through at least 2012.

for mission and MCC programs had been on a steady decline, evident in both a drop in long-term personnel and funding, and a shift to greater reliance on big donors and foundations. Several of us wrote papers around 2000 on what seemed a more elusive road to mutuality in ministry and mission, which taught me about new pitfalls. One way toward mutuality that was broadly voiced was to strengthen Mennonite World Conference (MWC) as an instrument for shared exercise of churchly power. Financial and idea power surely needed to be less heavily North American, and secondly European; nevertheless we found no transition device to make it happen. Over the space of three years initially, the CIM members authorized its representatives at MWC gatherings to support the formation of a global mission forum, hopefully with decision making and funding powers. Looking at what has developed in the past decade, what strikes me as a social historian is to observe the many ways apparent mutuality is manipulated from behind the scenes, mostly out of good will. But too many of the able leaders from the “South,” with large member churches, live in settings of great financial stringency, and there are still limits to sufficient talented leaders, so that naming such leaders to world Mennonite roles not only weakens the work at home. It also sets up such leaders for discouragement since they lack the communication tools and skills that those from better endowed churches take for granted. This past decade has also been a time of intensified pressures from supporting churches and their board members in North America to do program assessments, usually for reasons arising not from good missiological principles, but from donor satisfaction needs. That does not bode well for long-term North American engagement in global mission.

The Instruments of Ministry

Throughout my time as seminary teacher, I found myself returning regularly to the question — what is good teaching, in fact, what must we teach, and what methods make for effective teaching? The best I can report is how rare were the moments when intended teaching happened, less rare when people indicated they had learned, and I wondered about the teacher’s role in that. Indeed, to replace teacher with preacher or pastor could well lead to very similar conclusions. There is a reciprocity to teaching, and a mysterious serendipity when capacity to teach something and capacity to receive and learn come together. So what has been most consistent for me is the realization, at the end of most terms, that teaching the class had made it possible for me to change my mind, to have some more “aha” moments. So I keep hoping that as I work at the “to do list” still left, I will keep on learning to see and think better, and to contribute something to living globally.

Most of the instruments of ministry that I relied on were idea-related: re-

searching, interviewing, fostering archival collections or using them, planning and review meetings, writing memos or letters of encouragement or counsel, and often conversing in multilinguistic and multi-confessional settings. How does one measure these, except to do what you know to be right? Our East–West presence ministry was very small: one or two persons as students or teachers in a country, learning the language and engaging professors and students. So we planned retreats of our EastWest Fraternity for a particular country, where the MCC personnel could use the occasion to invite someone to lecture to us and engage in conversation, or we made a presentation to a group of local friends, which became a reference point to build on in relationship building, having conveyed that this is a church-based, not merely individual relationship building effort across the East–West divide. Once we met with a newly established Mennonite fellowship in Budapest — heady stuff, but it did not last, which also set us to pondering.

The apostle Paul’s note to his colleague to bring the books and the parchments often served as a reminder about the importance of book missionaries. Together with Mennonite Broadcasts we coordinated translations into local languages of some of the Mennonite Faith pamphlets. A bigger editing and coordinating project was the Barclay Commentary translation project. That story has been told in print several ways. What is worth recalling is how many times along the way, as the Cold War ebbed and flowed or the likelihood of getting an official license to import and distribute copies seemed more doubtful, both MCC boards and Baptist World Alliance boards debated and challenged themselves to trust that a way would open, that the money we raised and spent was not a waste. Permission finally came through; a magic moment to notice how a project, which we did openly and many knew about, so quickly got owned as our shared project across the East–West divide.

When I returned to editing journals during the last sixteen years of my time at AMBS, it too was a tool of ministry, a way, especially with the new internet access and email deliveries, to facilitate thinking persons’ writing about theology, mission, peace, or the task of rebuilding a good civil society across Eurasia, to talk with each other, who were unable to do so face-to-face.

But there were moments I thought about long after. Once Alan Krieder, who was very active in the early 1980s peace movement in Britain, as some of us were on the European continent, invited me to give a speech at a gathering in London. Present were mostly evangelical Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and persons from related societies, such as Frances Schaeffer’s L’Abri movement. The speakers presented just war, pacifist, and a kind of necessary war involvement, given our fallen world, ways of thinking. My assignment was to

speak about praxis from my East European experience.

I remember telling one story about an occasion when, in the Baptist church of Minsk, just before the last major sermon was to be preached, the door opened and in walked the head of the state religious affairs office for that region. The quick-thinking pastor welcomed the visitor, then indicated they would have a time of spoken prayers, before the last sermon. There was the usual murmur of voices, until one woman's prayer grew louder and others listened as she thanked God for their many blessings. She thanked God for the freedom of worship they were enjoying, for food to eat, for law and order in the city, for its officials who tried to do their work honestly when that was not so easy. Then she went on to pray for divine blessing on General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the Soviet Union. Help him, in spite of the many challenges, to push for the way of peace in the world, so we would never again experience the killing and suffering of the Great Fatherland war, when everyone there had lost a loved one. It was a story illustrating ways of doing what you can, and praying for friend and enemy was an obvious one. To my surprise, the session chair, a retired admiral, remarked that he had never thought of prayer in that way, as praying that God would bless the enemy, but why would the lady not pray for her government, even if it was regularly harassing their church life, because the Bible told us to do so? Too many things we fail to think of, until something causes you to notice.

I had encountered an officer at that gathering, then on the Prime Minister's advisory board for nuclear preparedness, but an evangelical Christian, who had earlier confessed his aloneness because his work was so highly confidential. So how was he to find his way as responsible Christian? When it came time to join together in communion, I chose to share the cup with him as an act of fraternal solidarity, although we knew we were on quite opposite sides of peace/war theological positions, but before our Lord and Savior, we stood as sinners saved by grace.

So often when I was in settings where there was surveillance, especially in Soviet days or elsewhere in Eastern Europe, it seemed prudent to censor one's speech. When Helmut Doerksen and I traveled to visit churches in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, we kept noticing that the pastors or sometimes bishops we met indicated they could not trust their colleagues. So we began thinking of ourselves as *de facto* visiting bishops, to whom they could pour out their thoughts and feelings, allowing them to try out thought options for how to proceed, and promising them confidentiality. Sometimes I wrote up a confidential report, but often those were pretty general in tone. Nevertheless, the more we thought about it, the more we sensed that an important

instrument of ministry we should risk was to seek to speak openly. We were not going to be like the Navigator missionary I once encountered in Poland, with whom I went for a long walk since it was obvious we were both believers, but only after two hours did he acknowledge (I guess because I knew his agency style already) that he was not a business person really, but a missionary of the Navigators, providing teaching materials for Catholic youth camps.

Sitting in our hotel room late one night after an all-day visit to the Baptist Union congress in Moscow, and unwinding, Peter Dyck and I decided we would speak freely to the hidden microphones. A half hour later, the listeners had learned a great deal about what was happening within the General Conference Mennonite church in USA, how we should seek to resolve an issue, and we hoped that might give them a better education than for them to keep listening for when we might drop the name of some local Mennonite leaders, who could then be accused of telling secrets to foreign church leaders. At least for us, we recognized it as a liberating act, even in our private moments we had felt free to state our deep love for God's church, in spite of its problems, and that was also how we talked with believers in the open parks the next afternoon.

The world is still very local, and the languages of faith are very many, so the road to living globally in God's church remains very difficult. Also daunting is the decline of Christianity in comparison to other religions, and especially to the growth and persistence of peoples living as if there is no God, as if the moral order of justice and peace for all no longer applies as shared human vision. So I close at this point with the reminder made by many, and so often spoken with despair, that we start to lose a meaningful sense that God so loved the world when we forget about each other, when we no longer bother to learn and remember the larger story, the evangel for all.