

Anabaptist Witness

*A Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Dialogue on
Key Issues Facing the Church in Mission*

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A Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Dialogue on Key Issues Facing the Church in Mission

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Jamie Pitts

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Editorial

The theme for this issue, “The Mission of God and Global Partnerships,” comes from the January 2018 consultation of the Council of International Anabaptist Ministries (CIM), held in Elkhart, Indiana, at the Mennonite Church USA offices and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. A day and a half of the consultation was given over to a plenary session, organized by Alain Epp Weaver (Mennonite Central Committee US) and a planning committee, in which a diverse group of participants shared their views on a range of topics related to global mission partnerships. Although much of the discussion centered on partnerships fostered by mission agencies, attention was also given to international partnerships between conferences and congregations.

Plenary speakers expressed thanksgiving for the past, present, and future of partnerships, lament for colonial legacies that continue to distort partnerships, and hope for practical improvements. Speakers consistently called for partnerships to find their rationale in God’s mission, in which mutual partnership is much more than a technique or strategy—it’s a fundamental goal.

The first section of essays in this issue present a sample of proceedings from the consultation plenary. Alain Epp Weaver provides a helpful summary introduction to the issues and stakes involved in global mission partnership. Next, César García casts a wide theological vision for Anabaptist partnerships. Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi reflects on the potential contributions of North American agencies, and Barbara Nkala questions the “limping alliances” produced when power remains concentrated in Western hands. Anicka Fast’s case for mission as partnership comes from her comments on a panel on young adults and mission partnerships (see her further reflections at www.anabaptistwitness.org; volume 5, issue 2). Two pieces contain remarks from a session on the International Missions Association; the authors are Richard Showalter and Yesaya Abdi and Tilahun Beyene Kidane. Ruth Keidel Clemens names the importance of global partnerships in the work of Mennonite Central Committee. My thanks to Alain Epp Weaver for encouraging CIM plenary speakers to submit material to this issue.

We received a second set of essays on global mission partnerships through our open call for submissions. Anne Thiessen suggests that a mutual hermeneutic of obedience to Christ can help overcome white privilege and other power imbalances that mar partnerships. James Krabill previews a forthcoming book of testimonies about partnerships between African-initiated Churches and North American Mennonites; his contribution includes an overview written by Wilbert Shenk and testimonies from southern and western Africa. Bruce Yoder explores the possibilities, challenges, and ambiguities of global mission partnership through a case study of the historic relationship between Menno-

nite Church Nigeria and Mennonite Board of Missions. Anicka Fast, writing in French, deepens our sense of the ambiguities of partnership with an examination of the intersections of race, colonialism, and Mennonite Brethren mission in the Belgian Congo. Since Fast received several critical responses to an earlier version of this essay, published in English in the journal *Missiology*,¹ she has written a clarification of the intentions and scope of the article, available in English and French on our blog (www.anabaptistwitness.org/blog). As usual, book and film reviews close out the issue.

Mission partnerships, like any relationships that matter to us, are difficult. Historical sins such as colonialism, racism, and sexism impede the development of genuinely mutual global partnerships. Time and money are limited, and so are our personalities. Shared theology and church practice can serve as bridges but also become points of conflict. In spite of the difficulties, we remain drawn into partnerships by friendship and mutual need, by overlapping history and vision, and, ultimately, by the Holy Spirit. Partnerships are difficult—but how good and pleasant it is to dwell in unity (Ps 133:1)! My hope is for these articles to serve the Spirit’s work of forming just partnerships for God’s mission in the world.

Jamie Pitts, editor

1 Anicka Fast, “Sacred Children and Colonial Subsidies: The Missionary Performance of Racial Separation in Belgian Congo, 1946–1959,” *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (2018): 124–36.

PROCEEDINGS FROM THE 2018
COUNCIL OF INTERNATIONAL
ANABAPTIST MINISTRIES PLENARY

Global Mission Partnerships: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future

ALAIN EPP WEAVER¹

What shape will mission partnerships between churches of the Global North and churches of the Global South take in the future? How will those mission partnerships learn from past experiences?

These questions animated a consultation earlier this year organized by the Council of International Anabaptist Ministries (CIM) on “The Mission of God and Global Partnerships.” Held January 9–11, 2018, on the campus of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, the consultation included paper presentations, panels, and workshops from church leaders, mission workers, and mission scholars from Canada, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Mexico, the United States, and Zimbabwe. These presenters were joined by staff from CIM member agencies (such as Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Mission Network, MB Mission, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Virginia Mennonite Missions, and more) in reflecting on the future of global mission partnerships.

The consultation proceeded from the recognition that the demographic center of global Christianity has shifted from the Global North to the Global South, where churches are experiencing rapid growth and are animated by a passionate commitment to sharing the gospel in word and deed with their neighbors near and far. The rise of global Christianity is challenging understandings of mission as being unidirectional (as from North America and Europe to the rest of the world) and as requiring Western finances and status to be successful. New visions of mission have slowly emerged as multidirectional global partnerships of churches (be they from the North or the South) join the work of God’s reconciling Spirit in the world.

Yet churches in the Global North retain significant power, consultation participants acknowledged, both in terms of financial resources and access to other resources (networking, education, training, etc.), and such power imbalances can lead to distorted mission partnerships. In light of these realities, con-

¹ *Alain Epp Weaver directs strategic planning for Mennonite Central Committee and is the author of Mapping Exile and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).*

sultation presenters addressed the following questions to examine what makes for robust global partnerships:

- What missiological visions have emerged among Anabaptist churches across Africa, Asia, and Latin America? How do these churches hope to partner with churches in Canada and the United States as they live into these visions?
- What are elements of successful mission partnerships that are marked by mutual transformation, support, and sharing? What element(s) of Anabaptism might aid us in fostering effective and healthy global partnerships? What practical steps can we take to ensure mutuality in mission partnerships when imbalances in access to and control of financial and other resources threaten to undermine such mutuality?
- What lessons can we learn from our past about what hinders and what fosters mutual mission partnerships? What patterns continue today, and how can we avoid colonial patterns of mission?

Throughout the consultation, a listening committee appointed by CIM member agencies sought to identify key learnings from the meetings that should inform the future of global mission partnerships. The committee named the following learnings:

1. Painful legacies of colonialism and racism continue to distort mission partnerships between churches in the Global North (including Canada and the United States) and churches in the Global South. We cannot ignore these legacies and must continue to grapple with them.
2. Strong mission partnerships are rooted in Scripture, in Jesus's example of servanthood, and in grateful response to God's gift of grace; strong mission partnerships are sustained by prayer and fasting.
3. Contribution of various types of resources is a sign of ownership of the partnership and its vision. Giving is a privilege. In authentic partnerships, we challenge one another to give in gratitude.
4. Time is needed for building strong mission partnerships; this comes into tension with pressures for "efficiency" or for immediate action.
5. We should not ignore or deny power imbalances, but rather be open and transparent about the types of power different parties to a partnership have. It is important to recognize different types of resources, strengths, and sources of power. At the same time, we dare not be naïve about the power money brings with it, and we must discern on an ongoing basis how money can both support and distort mission partnerships.

6. We have questions about whether or not “partnership” is the right word for what we seek. Do words like “communion” or “fellowship” perhaps better reflect the mission relationships we hope for?
7. Authentic mission partnerships are not top-down; they emerge “from below,” from a posture of humility and service.
8. Strong mission partnerships emerge when we build on relationships and histories of trust.
9. Strong mission partnerships emerge when we undertake new initiatives that have joint ownership (not just buy-in).
10. North American Anabaptist mission agencies must consider ways they can deliberately cede power and control in mission partnerships.
11. CIM leadership should strongly consider ways of formalizing regular participation of church leaders from the Global South (e.g., from Mennonite World Conference) in CIM meetings in a way that is not simply a token presence but that brings those leaders together with CIM members for prayer, discernment, and reflection.

CIM member agencies, like other mission agencies of the Global North, have undeniably fallen short time and again of an ideal of global mission partnerships marked by equality, mutual accountability, and support. Nevertheless, by God’s grace, mutuality in global mission partnerships has broken into the midst of colonial legacies and ongoing imbalances of power. May CIM member agencies continue to confront how legacies of colonialism and racism have distorted global mission partnerships, and seek true mutuality in those partnerships.

The Mission of God and Global Partnerships

Lessons from the Past, Possibilities for the Future

CÉSAR GARCÍA¹



Christ of Bojayá, Colombia. PHOTO: LWF/KAISAMARI HINTIKKA

The townspeople's terror and anguish was palpable. The gunshots and armed conflict had been going on for more than a day and a night when the first cylinder bomb exploded at 10:30 a.m. It was May 2, 2002. The day before, the leftist guerilla group known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) had attacked the far-right paramilitary group United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) in the town of Bojayá. Both illegal armed groups

¹ César Garcia is General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference.

had been fighting for control over this territory coveted for its wealth of natural resources and the routes it provided for the illicit trafficking of arms and drugs.

Bojayá is found in the Department of Chocó, on Colombia's northern Pacific coast. The population is largely indigenous and Afro-Colombian. The region has a long history of human rights violations and extreme poverty along with suffering abandonment by the Colombian government.

The Catholic Church has also been present in Bojayá for centuries. Perhaps for this reason on this particular day, in the midst of the armed combat and explosions, about 1,500 townspeople decided to seek refuge in the Catholic church building, in the priest's home, and among the Augustine nuns.

At 10:45 a.m., the third cylinder bomb torpedoed through the church roof and exploded on the altar, killing 119 people and wounding 98. Children and whole families had been sheltering there. The explosion also destroyed the arms and legs of the church's Christ on the Cross, leaving only the torso intact.

Throughout Colombia, this image of the mutilated Christ became a symbol of the 2002 massacre in Bojayá. Years after, during the peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government in 2015, leaders of the FARC visited the community of Bojayá and asked the families of the victims for forgiveness. Amazingly, when Colombia voted in the plebiscite on the peace agreement that had been hammered out between the government and the FARC, 96 percent of the people in Bojayá voted in favor of making peace. In contrast, a slight majority of the country—and especially a strong majority of Evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic churches—voted against the accords. The result was a national rejection of the peace accord. Shortly after, however, the accords were renegotiated and then signed in November of 2016.

What does this story have to do with the Mission of God and Global Partnerships? I suggest that the massacre in Bojayá and the plebiscite that followed can provide us with important historical lessons about Catholic and Evangelical/Pentecostal missions in Colombia. Extracting such lessons from a specific context like this Colombian one and its past will be very instructive in guiding our future mission efforts.

First of all, I want to clarify some concepts I believe to be of paramount importance before going into detail about lessons that we can learn from this story.

1. Mission

By the term *mission*, I refer to what the church *is* and *does* to bear witness to Jesus Christ in her ministry of reconciliation. Let me expand this definition a bit further:

What the church is:

- The church *is* a foretaste of the reign of God.

- The church does not “have” a message; it *is* the message.
- The church as message refers to its *presence*. This means any mission that is not communal and interdependent is weak.
- The presence of the church brings with it the proclamation of the gospel of *Jesus Christ* through both *word* and *deed*, thus promoting *reconciliation*.

According to Genesis 12:1–3, the divine plan for blessing all the nations on earth is achieved through the creation of a *new community*. This new community will live out a new *relational* ethic and will be the key in showing other nations the will of God for humanity. Hence, the mission of God requires a new *community* that practices a new way of relating (ethic) within a new order of reality. In the Scriptures, this new way of relating implies relationships rooted in justice, peace, and equality (cultural, economic, gender; see Gal 3:28). Practicing this new ethic will act as a centripetal force that will attract other nations of the Earth to want to know God. As such, the mission of God requires a new *people* with a new countercultural and alternative *ethic* that displays different political and social values from those commonly espoused in the context where this new people is to be found (Sermon on the Mount; Luke 4:16ff; etc.).

This understanding of God’s mission stands in sharp contrast to the concepts inspired by a poor interpretation of Evangelical Pietistic thought, that place emphasis on (1) mission *carried out by individuals* who understand salvation as personal and (2) *a new life for the individual* that will culminate in *eternal life* to be personally enjoyed after death.

According to evangelical theologians Brad Harper and Paul Metzger, however, the church’s identity “is itself communal and relational. It derives this communal being from the Triune God whose being is the three divine persons in communion, and who created it for communion.”² This communal and relational identity must reflect the kind of unity that we see in the Trinity. It is in the communion of the church—love, self-denial, forgiveness, and service—that the world can see the communion and character of God. This is a reason why divisions, lack of trust, fights for power, and authoritarianism are a scandal and contradiction to our witness to Christ.

This brings us to the definition of another term of utmost importance for today’s reflection—that of *partnerships*.

2. Partnerships

Our societies desperately need alternatives to violence and resentment. People yearn to see palpable examples of reconciliation, love, and forgiveness. The

² Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 19.

nations of the world long to see communities where nationalisms are overcome, where love is the mark of relationships, where forgiveness is a regular practice, and where reconciliation is a lived reality—together viscerally and visibly demonstrating the God we believe in. Only these kinds of communities will have the right to be heard in contexts of suffering where people are searching for new paradigms of peace and justice. In the words of Catholic theologian Gerhard Lohfink, “The real being of Christ can be bright only if the church makes visible the messianic alternative and the new eschatological creation that happens from Christ.”³

For this reason, we need to avoid the specialization and fragmentation that is typical of modernity and move to practical and relational experiences of holistic ministries that honor specialization without falling into separation. “We look forward to the day when our coming, common hope—the Lord Jesus—will make us one. We must live today in view of that day,”⁴ say Harper and Metzger. We do not need to wait until the second coming of Christ to experience communion and unity. Furthermore, we are called to live as a new creation in order to serve in the ministry of reconciliation. This ministry requires a community that lives now in light of what will be. Otherwise, continue Harper and Metzger, “we will continue sending a very clear message to the surrounding, cynical world that our God’s gospel is powerless to break down divisions among his people.”⁵ It follows that “partnership is not just a good suggestion” but God’s mandate for the church—God’s redeemed and reconciled community—affirms Jon Lewis,⁶ former president and CEO of Partners International, a nonprofit Christian ministry.

Therefore, “partnerships” is the term I use to refer to the kind of *relationship* that can be found among the people of God when we serve together interdependently in the mission of God. *Partnerships* require a solid *relationship* and a *shared purpose* that fosters *joint plans* and the *sharing of resources*. Partnerships play a fundamental role in God’s reconciling mission when we take seriously John Driver’s interpretation of God’s reign. Driver, a Mennonite theologian and international teacher, says God’s reign is made manifest through the concrete forms that life takes on among God’s people, and it is precisely in the midst of the relationships between them that the perfect Kingdom becomes a

3 Gerhard Lohfink, *La iglesia que Jesús quería: Dimensión comunitaria de la fe cristiana*, 4a. ed. (Bilbao: Desclee de Brouwer, 1986), 191–92.

4 Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 35.

5 Harper and Metzger, 281.

6 Jon Lewis, “Servant Partnership: The Key to Success in Cross-Cultural Ministry Relationships,” in *Shared Strength: Exploring Cross-Cultural Christian Partnerships*, eds. Beth Birmingham and Scott C. Todd (Colorado Springs, CO: Compassion, 2010), 59.

reality.⁷ In fact, according to Andrew Walls, British historian of missions, “The very height of Christ’s full stature is reached only by the coming together of the different cultural entities into the body of Christ. Only ‘together,’ not on our own, can we reach his full stature.”⁸ Therefore, *multicultural partnerships* are at the center of God’s mission.

Some years ago in the context of this Council of International Anabaptist Ministries meeting, I mentioned the call to understand mission—in *addition* to reconciliation, evangelism, and service—as God’s activity of bringing together diverse social fragments as parts of the same body, bringing to reality what Paul describes as the “very height of Christ’s full stature.”⁹ Ugandan Catholic priest and theologian Emmanuel Katongole names this call an “Ephesian Moment.” According to Ephesians, the “aha” moment of reaching the full stature of Christ happens when we are one with people of different cultures, serving and enriching each other. In this multicultural environment, we see the complete image of Christ.

With these two concepts in mind—mission and partnership—we return to the Colombian context to learn from experiences of missions there. After that, we will look at lessons from the African and European contexts in order to propose some possibilities for the future.

Lessons from the Past

Catholic and Orthodox missions made the expansion of Christianity possible during its first 1500 years. Even though this expansion was often embedded in armed empire expansion, aggression, and conquest, it is of utmost importance to learn from these missions given the short mission history of the Anabaptist movement. In the specific Colombian case of the Bojayá massacre, the Catholic community’s response to the plebiscite on the peace accords is very interesting in comparison with the response of the churches that are the fruit of Evangelical/Pentecostal missions. Taking into account what I mentioned above that both the method and the means *are* the message, the following table demonstrates some of the differences in mission methodology. Clearly this is a generalization; there are, of course, nuances and exceptions in the different missions of each tradition.

7 John Driver, “The Kingdom of God: Goal of Messianic Mission,” in *The Transfiguration of Mission: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Foundations*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1993), 86.

8 Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 77.

9 Emmanuel Katongole, “Mission and the Ephesian Moment of World Christianity: Pilgrimages of Pain and Hope and the Economics of Eating Together” *Mission Studies* 29, no. 2 (2012): 183–200.

Catholic Mission	Evangelical/Pentecostal Mission
From Below: Theology of the Cross	From Above: Theology of Glory
Communal: Reconciliation Unity in cultural, economic, and social diversity Accountability, obedience, and interdependence	Individualist: Personal salvation Fragmentation and denominational divisions Authoritarian leadership, independence
Holistic: salvation of the whole self (in the here and now)	Reduced: salvation of the soul (Heaven)

According to Latin American theologian and missiologist Samuel Escobar, “The traditional Catholic missionary orders such as Franciscans or Jesuits, which are supranational, provide the oldest and more developed example [of cooperative models], facilitated by the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience.”¹⁰ We commonly find in these mission models monastic orders that opposed structural systems based on exploiting the poor, and that preached a Gospel of *vulnerability* where Jesus identified with the needy and shared their suffering. The shattered crucifix of Bojayá is a clear image of *God incarnate* who is with the poor, experiences their reality, and suffers with them.

In contrast to this model, many non-Catholic missions arrived in Latin America from a position of power and wealth. Cases abound where the missionaries serving among the poor chose to live in housing separated from the people they served. The empty cross spoke of a God of Glory, distant and unmoved, who related to some groups in terms of doctrine while offering others economic prosperity. This model tended to import not only theologies from North America but also the liturgical, musical, and church organization styles from there. Sadly, the message’s contextualization was minimal.

Having been sent in *community*, the monastic orders communicated a message of interdependence, cooperative service that required *obedience* and mutual submission, conflict resolution, forgiveness, and *reconciliation*. In this model, salvation was dependent upon a community. The Catholic orders tangibly showed that people of *different nationalities*, economic classes, and social standing could live and serve together thanks to the Spirit of God. On the other hand, Evangelical/Pentecostal missions, preaching a gospel of personal and individual salvation, left community life on a secondary plane. In their fragmentation and competitiveness, some agencies promoted the message that independent service was possible, that obedience was not necessary, and that division was a valid option when faced with disagreement.

10 Samuel Escobar, “The Global Scenario at the Turn of the Century,” in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. William David Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 34.

Lastly, Catholic missions were not separated by type of mission or service. Although some monastic orders specialized in specific ministries, within the orders they had a variety of tasks related to education, community development, and caring for the sick. They thus developed and practiced *holistic* missions. In contrast, North American missiological differences resulted in some agencies placing the proclamation of their individualist gospel ahead of service and made saving the soul more important than attending to immediate and contextual needs.

The missiological method of the Catholic missions in Latin America communicates a concrete message, as does the Evangelical/Pentecostal missionary method. This could perhaps explain why many non-Catholic churches in Latin America ended up adopting the culture of the “empire”¹¹—understood as individualism, materialism and consumerism, and authoritarian leadership. The rejection of the peace process, along with the explicit political alignment of the evangelical churches with the far right in Colombia, is strong evidence of this reality. A God of Glory who does not identify with the poor, who demands retributive justice, whose salvation is solely personal with implications for life after death only, and who supports the ministry of authoritarian leaders who submit to no one, is a very different God from the shattered Christ of Bojayá.

Praise God that in our Anabaptist tradition we are able to find many examples of mission in solidarity with the people, rooted in community, and holistic at its core. For reasons of brevity, I will only mention two of these examples.

1. The Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC)

The Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC) is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in a revival in the Tanzania Mennonite Church in 1942 when the first Mennonite preachers arrived in Kenya from Tanzania. It was an African-to-African church growth movement that started in rural areas of western Kenya and later moved to small towns. It was characterized by experiences of miracles and healings. In addition, it dealt with tribal and cultural differences and with tensions among people of different social classes and levels of education.

The work of the Holy Spirit brought unity, interdependency, and trust among God’s people. Bishop Philip Okeyo from the KMC says, “When trust is developed between partners in mission, great speed of accomplishment is guaranteed.”¹² This summarizes very well the work of the international agen-

11 René Padilla cited by Milton Acosta in “Power Pentecostalism: The ‘non-Catholic’ Latin American church is going full steam ahead—but are we on the right track?” *Christianity Today* (July 29, 2009), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/august/11.40.html>.

12 Philip E. Okeyo, “A Word from Kenya,” in *Forward in Faith: History of the Kenya Mennonite Church; A Seventy-Year Journey, 1942–2012*, eds. Francis S. Ojwang

cies that joined the KMC in its effort to bring a holistic gospel to Kenya. Missionaries from Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) accompanied relief and development work led by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) along with support for business entrepreneurs by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA).

Now after 75 years (1942–2017), the Mennonite church in Kenya, the fruit of a Tanzanian church mission, comprises 12,000 members in 145 congregations and has planted a new church in Uganda that in turn became a member of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) in 2017.

This missiological model, with its strong emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit and its clear Anabaptist-Pentecostal identity, is a critique of modern movements of revival that offer prosperity without renouncement, power without humility, salvation without following, and joy without self-denial. In the church mission from Tanzania to Kenya and then from Kenya to Uganda, we see a mission model from the ground up where Christ crucified is both the strategy and the message, and where dependence on the Holy Spirit leads to ministries of justice, peace, and reconciliation. We are reminded that the New Testament gospel of salvation comes to us from a position of socioeconomic and political weakness rather than from economic affluence and human power.¹³ As described by Anabaptist missiologist David A. Shank,¹⁴ the missionary attitude must be defined through Christology by:

- a) Self-denial, as a pre-requisite;
- b) Service, as its position;
- c) Identification, as the risk;
- d) Humble obedience, as contradiction;
- e) The Cross, in consequence.

2. The Ministry Partnership between French and North American Mennonites

According to David Neufeld, “From 1953 to 2003, MMF [Mission Mennonite Française] and MBMC (Mennonite Board of Missions after 1971) worked with each other and with a variety of other partners, most prominently Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), to develop a joint missionary venture . . . [that resulted in] the founding of three Mennonite congregations in the greater Paris area, the establishment of ministries for youth with developmental

and David W. Shenk (Nairobi, Kenya: Kenya Mennonite Church, 2015), 8.

13 John Driver, “Messianic Evangelization,” 200.

14 David A. Shank and James R. Krabill, *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 159–67.

disabilities and mental health conditions, the development of ministries for foreign students and for people with social and spiritual needs, and the creation of a center for the study and promotion of Anabaptist theology.”¹⁵ Allen Koop, cited by Neufeld, observes in his study of postwar evangelical missions in France that “no other missionary project in the country during the latter half of the twentieth century fostered cooperation as close and as productive as that carried out by French and North American Mennonites. No other mission succeeded in combining evangelism and church planting with significant social work to the same degree. No other mission demonstrated the same openness to collaborating with outside groups and agencies, including the French state.”¹⁶

This model demonstrates the opportunity that *joint projects* represent for bringing distant groups together and inviting them to work together. It requires *interdependence* during the planning, evaluation, and completion of the project, which is in and of itself a mark of a healthy *partnership*.

In addition, this experience reveals the importance of *strong organizational structures* that help to clarify roles, facilitate communication, and formalize accountability processes. The effect of donors and the source of *funds* needed to sustain a mission would be another instructive topic to explore in this history, especially considering that Catholic missionary practice is to have a common purse in managing mission funds.

Possibilities for the Future

Theology, ecclesiology, and missiology must be developed by taking the final goal into account. God calls us to live the truth, a new creation that reflects God’s intention for the world. Eschatology, therefore, is the beginning of missiology.

Thus, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) wishes to ask ourselves what God’s intention is for God’s people and then build our global church structure and mission practice from there. It is this vision that propels us to promote interdependent work among the agencies related to our member churches. At MWC, we would like to see enhanced relationships and cooperation among our approximately 75 mission agencies, 50 service agencies, 30 agencies working for justice and peace, 140 health organizations, and 130 educational institutions. Even so, we have encountered the following obstacles:

- Some agencies from the Northern hemisphere prefer to think of MWC as *an event* where we meet to tell stories. The idea that we can be a global

15 David Yoder Neufeld, *Common Witness: A Story of Ministry Partnership between French and North American Mennonites, 1953–2003* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2016), vii.

16 Neufeld, 154.

communion that plans and works together on concrete projects is a little scary for some.

- Some agencies from the Northern hemisphere privilege *efficiency over interdependence*. The latter slows everything down, in their view, and needs a lot of patience.
- Some agencies compete with one another. The need for economic support and donors leads them to highlight their own work and diminish what others are doing.
- Some agencies lack a theology and understanding of what the church and the global communion are. It is not clear to them why a global church is necessary; this makes a multicultural interdependent mission difficult. For these agencies, God's reign is limited to individual local congregations and independent agencies that don't need to be in fellowship with others.
- Some leaders continue to put their goal of increasing numbers ahead of Anabaptist convictions and relationships within our communion.
- Some leaders are unaware of and devalue what their predecessors decided. They aim to start their ministries from scratch, ignoring what others have built in and contributed to the churches and ministries that they now aspire to lead.

Given the above, I want to insist on the necessity of dialoguing with our Catholic monastic roots. Monasticism influenced our Anabaptist movement at its inception.¹⁷ Genuinely learning from their vow of poverty can help us propose a mission that promotes living simply as some of our Anabaptist agencies already do. In the words of Escobar:

Before any “practical” training for mission in the use of methods and tools for the verbal communication of a message, it is imperative to form disciples for *a new style of missionary presence*. Mission requires orthopraxis as well as orthodoxy. . . . This Christological model that was also the pattern under which Paul and the other apostles placed their own missionary practice could be described as “mission from below.”¹⁸

By the same token, a look at their vow of monastic obedience could help us avoid the sin of division that we Anabaptists have so easily fallen into over the centuries. The Global South in particular needs new models of leadership that

17 C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 27.

18 Escobar, “The Global Scenario at the Turn of the Century,” in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. William David Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 43

know how to submit one to another in humility and not accept fragmentation as something normal in the life of the church. God's intention for humanity invites us to send mission *teams*, or "micro-communities," that include members from different cultures; practice lifestyles matching that of the people they seek to serve; mix evangelism with peacebuilding, community development, attending to the sick and education; and practice forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the only way we will succeed in *being* the message that God has for God's creation.

It is my prayer that the Christ of Bojayá continue to call God's church to the sacrificial mission of service to the neediest, to a mission that results in faith communities that practice daily forgiveness and reconciliation in the living hope of a new creation.

The Mission of God and Global Relationships

JEANNE ZIMMERLY JANTZI¹

Even now I can clearly remember the nighttime moment in the Kasai-Oriental province of Zaire, lying on my back on the ground under a huge star-filled sky in the middle of a group of Zairian women friends and thinking to myself—this is it. This is exactly what I have always dreamed of. I wrote to our families about that experience in April 1993. We'd been living in Zaire with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for four years by that time.

I got asked to preach April 2 at the Communauté Évangélique Mennonite Women's Meeting. Dan and the boys dropped me off by motorcycle at Mamu Kabedi's house at 1:30 in the afternoon. We finally started walking by 3:00. In the meantime, she fed us (the three women waiting for her to get herself together) beignets and peanuts. She laughed at my impatience to get going. She said this is the perfect time in my life (between babies) to be running around with the women. No nursing baby to make me rush home, no little baby to carry along . . . we had all the time in the world! After we finally got walking (on our 18-kilometer hike out to a village) we stopped at two other women's homes to wait for them to get going too. Both fed us again—one, peanuts, and the other came dashing out of her house holding the bowls of food, praying over it as she ran so we could eat fast and go.

We ended up being a group of eleven women. When we had to go past the rude and crude diamond diggers at the Mbuji-Mayi River, the women surrounded me to hide me in the middle of the group and started singing one of the walking songs really loudly. Otherwise, people can be really rude. We sang most of the walk, and even the middle-aged ones jogged up the hills in time to the music. We finally got out to the village at 8:15 p.m.

There were 111 women camped out under the stars beside a tiny palm-branch-shelter church. They swept the ground smooth—no grass for snakes. This was a group of women from eight subregions of the Commu-

¹ *Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi enjoyed a wealth of intercultural experiences with the global church during her years of international living while serving with Mennonite Central Committee. Since 2017, she has served as Superintendent of Central Christian School in Kidron, Ohio.*

nauté Evangélique Mennonite. The next Sunday, I heard a woman stand up in church and praise God that it didn't rain on our campout. She's right. There weren't even enough houses in that village to put 111 women.

I looked around for an empty space to put down my pagne and go to sleep—it was almost 9:00 p.m. I'd just lain down when Mamu Bisosa came over and said, "What? We're just ready to start our worship service. Come on!" So we had a complete service with a sermon on Jesus telling his disciples to go get the donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem. Mamu Dalamba had an interesting twist. She said over and over that we need to be untied (like the donkey). Why? Because the Master has need of us. She repeated over and over, "What's tying you down when the Master has need of you?"

Finally, I went to lie down again. This time Mamu Ngalula (from the Lukelenge group) brought me a mat to sleep on. I had been on a pagne by myself, but Mamu Kabedi and Mamu Mujinga said I couldn't sleep all by myself; it was too cold! So we spent the night with three women and a baby on a space no bigger than 4 feet wide. But I'm getting ahead of my story. We had just lain down when they woke us back up to eat nshima at 10:30 p.m. THEN we got to sleep.

Up at 5:00 a.m. to sing and pray again. Bucket baths one at a time for everyone. We started our church service by 9:00 a.m. with even more women arriving on foot that morning. I preached on Romans 8:35, and around there. It went pretty well, but the "Amen speaker" redirected my point and probably improved on it.

I ended up being sick for two weeks after drinking Lubilangi River water during that women's event. It was worth it. I am incredibly grateful to have lived that experience with those women at a time in my life when I "had all the time in the world."

The story of God's mission and global relationships has been an ongoing theme in my life. Dan and I served with MCC in assignments in DR Congo, Nigeria, Indonesia, and then in Thailand as Area Directors for Southeast Asia from 1989 until 2017 with the exception of a four-year stretch for graduate school and living near family. My parents served with MCC in Indonesia before my birth. I grew up on their stories and pictures from their time on the island of Timor serving as "Fraternal Workers" under the Indonesian leadership of the Gereja Masehi Injili Timor—the Evangelical Church of Timor. I've spent some time over the past years transcribing my mother's weekly letters from Timor and comparing them with my own letters written thirty years later during our first term in Zaire—both of us as young women in our twenties experiencing the world church for the first time. As young people, my parents had served in an assignment location several islands away from their in-country

MCC leaders, with whom they communicated only via telegrams and infrequent letters.

As I grew up, I always heard my parents talk about these Timorese church leaders with respect. That is intriguing to me, because I can tell from the letters I've transcribed that my parents' respect for local church leadership grew after they left Timor and gained more distance and life experience. The way my parents had reframed their stories and recounted them to my brother and me as children differed from the sometimes raw rants my mother wrote as she lived those experiences.

I know now that when my parents went to Timor in 1959, the model of Fraternal Workers—foreign workers who served as guests of the local church—was a rather new concept. This model formed my expectation for interactions in the world church. Those were the stories I heard as I grew up.

Young North Americans have much to learn from older faith leaders of other cultures. I found this next little paragraph in my mother's letter written on April 1, 1960, in Kupang, Timor, Indonesia. At age 26 she wrote, "Monday and Tuesday were Muslim holidays. Here they celebrate like New Years and Christmas by visiting. On Tuesday evening, Glenn and I went with Abinenos to visit the head of the veterinarian service and the head of the Military, who are both Muslims. They had gobs of visitors. We have cake and pop and visit a while. The purpose is to show respect, mostly."

That snippet of a letter holds a wealth of information. My parents' supervisor in the Evangelical Church of Timor was J. L. Abineno. When my family served in Indonesia with MCC forty years after my parents' MCC term, I learned that Abineno was an important Reformed theologian, author, and church leader not only in Timor but also across Indonesia. In 1960, my parents were young rural Ohio Mennonites in their first year of intercultural experience. It is amazing to me that Abineno invited them to make these important Idul Fitri visits along with him. I can imagine that it never would have occurred to my young parents to visit either military people or Muslims to mark a major Muslim holiday if they had been making their own plans that day. In the letter, I can hear my mother echoing to her Ohio parents the explanation that Abineno must have given to her about the purpose of their visits. "It's to show respect." Abineno, an Indonesian pastor and leader, encouraged my parents to reach beyond their boundaries that day. He held an important place in shaping my parents' development as lifelong connectors, which, in turn, shaped me and many other people.

As longterm MCC workers, we've had an unusual opportunity to live among world churches. We've led MCC teams working alongside the church in relief, development, and peace. We have always been active in local congregations, but we've never been leaders or pastors or advisors or church planters or organizers or elders. We have preached very rarely. We've been a part of choirs,

women's fellowship, baby dedications, home Bible study fellowships, baptisms, weddings, funerals, conflicts, communion, miscarriages, scandals, footwashing, parties, wife searches, contests, and hospital visits with our Dipumba Plain congregation in Zaire; our Anglo Jos congregation in Nigeria; our Siloam congregation in Indonesia; and our Payap congregation in Thailand. In these congregations, we have always found people who have given us counsel and who have included us.

We've had opportunities to serve at higher levels of MCC leadership, but we've never served from either of MCC's geographic centers in the United States or Canada. Because none of our experience has been in North American offices, we've had the rare opportunity to have been participant observers, shaped by almost twenty-five years of hearing the interpretation of scripture and current events and history from the point of view of world church contexts.

Vision of the World Church

Imagine how this passage from Ephesians 4:3–6,11–16 (NIV) would sound if you were sitting in the midst of a whole stadium filled with members of Mennonite World Conference from countries around the world. How does this passage sound if we imagine the body of Christ in a global context?

³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

When we imagine the body of Christ as something global, we no longer think of the world as “us” and “them” but rather as “WE.” We cannot fall back on colonial assumptions that God's gifts of leadership emanate from “us” in our particular geographic location; God's gifts spread across the whole body. From Christ, the global communion “joined and held together by every supporting

ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” I can imagine our various conferences, churches, and agencies around the world as the supporting ligaments that join and hold together the body of the worldwide church as we participate in God’s mission.

I see Mennonite World Conference (MWC) as a faithful yet imperfect attempt to knit together fluid combinations of Anabaptists around the globe. Have you ever played the icebreaker game in which participants stand in a circle to toss a ball of yarn back and forth as they get to know names or answer questions? A person holds on to the yarn and answers a question and then keeps hold of a strand while throwing the ball of yarn to the next person. By the end of the game, the group is woven together by such a complex web of yarn that it would be difficult to untangle. That game illustrates for me the hope I have for God’s mission and global relationships. The shape of the game is a circle in which all participants are facing toward each other. The circle can expand to include a growing number of participants. No one sits in a second row, takes a back seat, or holds sole leadership. In the circle, there is no hub, but there is a clear central core of the shared space in the middle. The layers of yarn are a bit messy and can get tangled. Even if one participant loses her grip on the yarn, the web still holds until she can grab hold again. Of course, all analogies break down, but I like the image.

Attempting to Embody the Body of Christ

How does our perspective change if we consider God’s ongoing mission of reconciliation broadly through the “WE” of the world church rather than specifically through our individual agencies? When we think of God’s mission in the world, many agencies based in the West think of working in partnerships. I imagine that the partnership concept originated in the West because it is a business and legal model that makes sense in cultures that appreciate formality and linear thinking. We even translate *koinonia* as “partnership.” Other cultures may have more fluid forms of collaboration and think of *koinonia* a bit differently in terms of “communion” or “fellowship.”

I find it interesting that even though the scriptures call for unity across the church, when we talk about God’s mission and the world church, we almost always talk about separate identities coming together in partnership. We more often think of “us” and “them” in mission partnerships than WE. We use pairs of words to describe a two-sided stakeholders’ partnership relationship to each other. These pairs often imply a power differential between the two groups. We may talk about senders and receivers, donors and beneficiaries, uppers and lowers, guests and hosts, missionaries and national church leaders, funders and recipients, developed and developing, helpers and helpees, First World and Two-third Worlds, the home church and the mission church, the Global North and the Global South.

Many of the words used to describe intercultural work imply a power imbalance: to disciple, to empower, to grow, to develop, to equip, or to build capacity. The words often have a connotation of one party being actively engaged and one party being acted upon. In these words, we can hear fairly clearly who knows and who does not know. These words, layered on top of our Western legacy of colonialism, can be dangerous. In the Ephesians passage, we hear “we” language rather than “us” and “them” language. We hear a shared calling to participate in God’s mission to build up the body of Christ. In this passage, we hear about a distribution of gifts and a fluid flow of giving and receiving from ever-changing directions within a unified body.

As we work interculturally within the world church, we need to recognize our differences. Within the unity of our fellowship, we differ in important ways. As we work together as the body of Christ, we will often find ourselves in the geographic or cultural space of another part of the body. To describe these differences, I think one pair of words can be helpful: the members of the world church fluidly change to become either Insiders or Outsiders depending on the situation. I like these terms better than the other pairs I previously mentioned, because no one gets permanently stuck with just one label. When an action takes place in your geographic location and in your cultural context, you are an Insider. As an Insider, you are an expert in that place. Alternatively, when you participate in action that takes place in the geographic location of someone else and outside of your cultural context, you are an Outsider. As an Outsider, you are a learner and a guest in that place. Our roles and perspectives can shift depending on where we are in the world and what we are doing. Even though an Outsider can learn and appreciate many things about a different context, the Outsider will rarely become fully an Insider in that context. For example, when MCC works with the Muria Church in Java, Indonesia, MCC workers who are American, Canadian, Zambian, or Indian are Outsiders. Members of the Muria Church are Insiders. When the Muria Church based in Java partners with MCC to work on the island of Papua, then both the Muria Church and MCC are Outsiders. Church members in Papua are Insiders.

The only place where everyone sheds the Outsider label and where we can all become Insiders is when we come together to create something that is new for all of us and where all of us participate equally in its creation. When MWC meets in gathered assemblies, we are all Insiders because we are doing something new together that is not tied to a specific geographic location. My hope is that we grow in our recognition of the body of Christ and of our need to move forward together as we participate in God’s mission.

Stories of Partnerships: Creating Our Own Partner

As we talk about the mission of God and global partnerships, I’d like to focus on the kind of partnerships that bring together Insiders in collaborative rela-

tionships with Outsiders. My first story is about the time when MCC Zaire tried to create its own partners.

MCC Zaire: Katanda

When Dan and I started with MCC in 1989, the organization had entered deeply into the philosophy that partnership was much preferred over direct implementation as the way to interact with the church outside of North America. Everyone talked about the problem of “dependency” and cringed when we heard parent/child metaphors. Without really understanding mission history at the time, I remember my sense of judgment and impatience as I blamed Zairian church leaders who, in their requests for funds, talked about the Zairian church as a child abandoned by her parents. As I look back, I think we had a feeling that it was our responsibility as MCC to force a child church to grow up. In Zaire in 1989, Outsiders from Mennonite agencies were migrating away from mission station assignments and moving toward living in the communities where Mennonite Insiders lived. As we understood it at that time, the Outsiders’ goal was for the Insider church to be able to be sustainable and not dependent on outside resources to maintain all of the infrastructure built up by earlier mission efforts.

In an attempt at a new model, MCC assigned Dan and me—25-year-old inexperienced community development workers—to serve with the Communauté Évangélique Mennonite (CEM) in Kasai-Oriental in Zaire. The CEM had parted ways from the Communauté Mennonite au Zaire some thirty years before during a time of ethnic conflict. This denomination had not had any Outsider workers for the thirty years since that denominational split.

The CEM leaders decided that Dan and I and our baby, Ben, would live in the village of Katanda. We would work together with a CEM counterpart, who would also start a CEM church in Katanda. Kolela Shambuyl, a CEM pastor in his early thirties, also moved to Katanda at that time together with his family. His wife, Muambuyl, was our age, and they had five children. Our two families lived across the path from each other in mudbrick, thatched houses. We grew to know each other very well, and our families were back and forth every day.

In 1989, the philosophical importance of working in partnership was so strong that MCC Zaire sometimes helped the church create our own partners in order to have an entity to partner with. Our assignment was to help the church of CEM Insiders start their own development office together with Pastor Kolela and another pastor, Mbuyi. Dan and I had our living support from MCC. Pastor Kolela and Pastor Mbuyi had a promise of living support from the church as the CEM’s part of the partnership, but in those very hard times, they never received support. The CEM denomination had very few financial resources and almost no infrastructure because of an earlier conflict. The only

thing we had together to start a development office was an acronym and four of us as human resources. MCC committed to fund projects but not any operating costs. This was seen as tough love for the CEM and helping them to step up to the reciprocity of partnership. But the CEM had so much internal conflict, inflation was so astronomical, and there was so much political instability that the development office never developed past training two teams of oxen and two groups of farmers. We suspected that church leaders would not have prioritized a development office except that it was a way to get back into a funding relationship with North Americans. That early attempt at partnership was not effective in terms of development outcomes. We eventually reframed our experience positively in terms of the relationships and empathy developed and the life lessons learned during that time.

MCC Zaire: Mbuji-Mayi

My second story of partnership between Outsiders and Insiders also comes from Zaire. By 1992, we had left the village of Katanda, together with Pastor Kolela and Muambuyi, because of a century-old interethnic land conflict that resurfaced violently. We moved to Mbuji-Mayi, an overgrown diamond mining camp city of over a million people. Although the concentration of population indicated a city, Mbuji-Mayi had no electricity, running water, postal system, or telephone and only a few crumbling paved roads. That year, the first of a half million internally displaced people started streaming into Mbuji-Mayi. They were Baluba people, fleeing from Shaba Province, where then-President Mobutu had been instigating a program of ethnic cleansing. Because Mobutu backed the violence, he wanted to keep it secret from the world. That was possible because Mbuji-Mayi was in a diamond mining zone and very few foreigners had permission to be there. The poor condition of the roads across the country meant that the airport became the heavily guarded port of entry from other parts of the country.

Because Dan and I and another couple from Africa InterMennonite Mission already had permits to live in the diamond mining zone, we joined with local Catholic and Protestant leaders in an ecumenical committee to try to receive and respond to these thousands of refugees. For the first months, we had very limited funds, and none of us had any experience in managing a crisis of that size with no resources.

After six months in which the rest of the world did not know what was happening, a few large humanitarian organizations received permission to enter Kasai-Oriental. Here is an excerpt from a letter I wrote to my parents on May 11, 1993, soon after Doctors without Borders arrived and when our Mbuji-Mayi ecumenical committee tried to partner with them. As you read my letter, look for the ways in which I imagine us all as Insiders doing some-

thing new together, and the times when I back away and consider myself as an Outsider. I was 28 when I wrote this:

The refugees are as stressful as ever. In one of my reflective moments, I narrowed my stresses down to six!

1. **Refugees' accusations.** Everyone assumes that our committee is "eating" all the aid funds.
2. **Government interference.** We had the Director of Social Affairs, a real Mobutu man, actually calling the refugees to pillage during a food distribution time. Our friend has been accused by the mayor of Mbuji-Mayi for saying that the governor stole two barrels of refugee fuel. (He did.) The governor is trying to force the president of our ecumenical committee to write a letter saying the churches have failed and that we want him to take over. The governor and his cronies go over to the refugee camp and tell the people, "Look how you are being mistreated!" Then on Saturday night, the Mbuji-Mayi refugee situation was on Zairian National Television (controlled by Mobutu). It showed the overcrowding and poor conditions and reported that it was the fault of the churches and their White missionaries.
3. **We are deflated to learn that the church committee we have been defending is not above reproach, either.** There is a lot of underhandedness going on. We feel like we have to be policemen, but it is too time consuming to be everywhere and oversee everything to make sure nothing is stolen. Even pastors are taking extra sacks of corn to feed people in their parish who no longer fit the criteria of those we are able to serve. They are able to justify it all to themselves because it truly is a real need. Yet they sneak it because they know it isn't kosher.
4. **The real needs of the refugees.** Sometimes we just want to walk out because too much is dumped on us and too much shady business is going on. But in the end, if things collapsed (and it feels like we're the ones holding things together) it would be the truly needy who would suffer.
5. **The police job dumped on us by Medecins Sans Frontiers and other donors.** A lot of donors say they are only giving to this local committee because we are there. That kind of holds us personally responsible for the money, and yet we are not the official administrators, so we can't make the policy and hard decisions. MSF has made Dan personally responsible for the fuel and me responsible for the medicines. These things were entrusted to

Dan and I individually and not to our committee.

6. **Guilt for not doing our regular work and keeping up with all our CEM contacts as we work with the larger church effort.**

Every time you are one place, you think of two other places you should be!

As I read my words now, I cringe at some of what I wrote. Our colonial legacy of privilege rather than our education or experience made us helpful to the ecumenical committee. The humanitarian agencies told us that they gave funds to the local committee because Dan and I were there. We felt we had to be policemen. Why did we assume we should have that power over church leaders twice our age? As White Outsiders from North America, we had access to networks that Insiders did not have. Because of our colonial privilege, we got permission to use the satellite phone of the government diamond mining company to make a call to MCC headquarters to tell what was happening and to try to get funding. Through church members working at the airport, we learned that Ofeibea Quist-Arcton of the *Guardian* was being held by airport immigration and would not be allowed to see any internally displaced people. Dan went late at night to the airport to give an interview because she wasn't allowed to leave the airport. But even that—why was the voice of a White man trusted more as a news source than the Zairian people living the reality as they hung around the airport? The story of Insiders working with Outsiders is often a story of colonial privilege—even when there are good intentions.

Rationale for Partnership

Throughout history, mission has been used to carry out colonial agendas. Missionaries have been co-opted into expanding the reach of their citizenship country. At the very least, the way of Outsiders having access to work with Insiders has been smoothed by colonial power. Our passports carry power. Although church mission agencies highlight the kingdom of God rather than earthly nations, many features of mission mirror the themes of conquest, expansion, and colonization.

As we look back at our history and forward to new ways of working, we seek fresh opportunities for a different kind of relationship between various parts of the body of Christ with different identities, histories, nationalities, cultures, structures, and geographic locations. North American agencies give different rationales for a shift to global partnerships across the world church, often appealing to logic. Here are seven of the reasons I've heard over time. I'm sure you could add to my list.

1. **Demographics.** North American agencies might say, “We should shift to global partnerships across the world church because the face of the church is changing. Since there are now more Christians in the Global South than in other parts of the world, we should shift to a model of global partnerships in recognition of this new reality.” This logic assumes that only now, with numbers on the rise, should North Americans begin to value the contributions of the church in other parts of the world. I think that the faithful lives and perspectives and witness of Christians in the Global South and East should matter regardless of the global census of the church.
2. **Recruiting challenges.** North American agencies might say, “Our culture has changed. We can no longer recruit enough Outsider workers to commit and to stay in a country long term to implement our programs. Therefore, it is pragmatic to partner with Insider groups to implement our programs.” This logic assumes that Insider implementation is mainly a compromise solution. It also assumes that Outsiders are still in charge, supervising and directing the work of the Insider workers even as the action takes place in the cultural and geographic context of the Insiders.
3. **Visa challenges.** Western agencies might say, “The political landscape of the world has changed. We can no longer get visa permission to work in the countries where we want to work. A practical solution is to base Outsiders in a more easily accessible place outside of the country and to work through citizens who already have permission to be in the country.” Unfortunately, this logic also assumes that Outsiders are still in charge, supervising and directing the work of Insiders, but from outside the country.
4. **Danger.** North American agencies might say, “The places where we want to work are too dangerous for Outsiders to be there. It is better for Insiders to work in a dangerous place, because their cultural knowledge and ability to fit in will make them safer.” There are times when Insiders must tell Outsiders that it is better for them to go than to be a burden on the Insiders who need to keep the Outsiders safe. If this logic assumes that North American agencies will continue to direct the work of Insiders from afar, we place an uncomfortable judgment on comparative value of the lives of Outsiders and Insiders.
5. **Stewardship.** North American agencies might say, “The costs of supporting an Outsider family are rising. It makes good business sense to support a local worker whose support costs much less than a foreigner.” This logic assumes that local workers should expect a different level of living allowance, medical care, travel allowance, children’s education costs, and support network than Outsider workers.

6. **Impact.** North American agencies might say, “We partner because it is a more effective way to implement our plans. In recognition that Insiders know their own cultural context best and speak the language better than almost any Outsider, it is best to have local people carry out our program.” This logic may support local efforts while not questioning the problematic assumption that the content of development ideas, theological studies, training materials, music, or peace theology will originate from North American Outsiders.
7. **Postcolonial thinking.** North American agencies might say, “We partner because we don’t want to be colonial. We recognize that mission models may be open to accusations of coercion. We partner to show that we have moved past a colonial model.” Unfortunately, while the term “partnership” might be good for communications or public relations, the use of the term does not guarantee a healthy, equitable, or postcolonial relationship.

I hope that instead of citing rationale for practicality or effectiveness or stewardship or demographics, the world church seeks collaborative relationships as we participate in God’s mission, because we, as the world church, are the result of that mission—“so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

As we all know, figuring out these relationships and working together in various fluid combinations across the church can be messy and slow and full of challenges. In the words of a South African proverb I saw painted on the wall of the Johannesburg airport, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Importance of Relationship

Mutual relationships form the foundation for healthy collaboration. Indonesian Anabaptists have a unique story in terms of historic relationships with North America. The Javanese Church grew out of the mission work of Dutch Mennonites during the time when Indonesia was a Dutch colony in the 1800s. North American Mennonite mission agencies did not plant early churches in Indonesia. In the 1920s, an ethnic Chinese family independently became followers of Jesus and asked a Dutch Mennonite missionary, working with the Javanese church, to baptize them. The Muria Church grew out of that community and never came under the supervision of an Outsider agency. The Jemaat Kristen Indonesia Church separated from the Muria Church in the 1970s and also has never been under the wing of an Outsider agency.

At the time of Indonesian Independence after World War II, the Dutch Mennonite missionaries had to leave the country. MCC came at that time to

work with the Javanese church as they experienced famine. MCC set up its office in the same space as the GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa/Evangelical Church of Java) church offices. Over the next thirty years, the affairs of MCC and the Javanese church became entwined in an unhealthy way.

Things came to a head in 1976 when the Indonesian leader of the Ecumenical Indonesian Communion of Churches (himself from the Reformed tradition), observed MCC's relationship with the Javanese church from his vantage point and accused MCC of "spiritual feudalism," refusing to grant a church visa to new MCC representatives.

MCC eventually resolved that issue by moving their office from Pati in Central Java—where the Javanese church was located—to Jakarta. MCC Indonesia entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indonesian government to do development work under a government relationship, rather than having workers on religious visas relating to the church. From 1976 to 2001, the Indonesian churches based in Central Java did not officially relate to MCC representatives living in Jakarta. Instead, they related directly to the MCC Asia Director, who, at that time, was based in Akron, Pennsylvania. The MCC Asia Director made short visits to Indonesia and the churches every eighteen months or so but did not speak the Indonesian language.

When we came to Indonesia in 2001, we were given the opportunity to relate in a different way to Indonesian Anabaptist denominations. We moved the MCC office from Jakarta to Salatiga, in Central Java. This placed MCC's office within one to five hours' drive of the majority of Anabaptist-related congregations. It was close enough for MCC's workers to participate in the regular life of the churches but not be on top of the synods in their office spaces. Dan and I, as MCC representatives, carried the direct relationship with the Indonesian churches and spent considerable relational time with church people. MCC partnered with the synods and also with other partners suggested to MCC by church leaders.

Over time, we came to know more of the background about what happened in 1976. We learned that one of the issues for the Anabaptist-related churches was MCC's title of "representative" for the MCC leader placed in the country. Why should Outsiders have the right to represent the Indonesian churches? Outsider representatives were perceived as a bottleneck, preventing the churches from representing themselves to the larger MCC or to the world church. We learned to carefully word our title as "MCC Representatives *to* Indonesia" instead of "MCC Indonesia Representatives." In our early years, we often clarified that we did not presume to represent Indonesia but that we represented the North American agency of MCC *to* Indonesian churches, institutions, and government. We explained our presence as representatives by saying that MCC respected the Indonesian churches so much that they sent us to be face-to-face representatives in MCC's relationship with the church. It felt important that

representatives be empowered by the organization to be decision-makers so that when church leaders spoke with representatives, they met with peers rather than with messengers or assistants.

MCC's relationships with the church changed because we lived in the same neighborhoods with church folks and because we theoretically had "all the time in the world." We could meet often for fellowship, regular Sunday services, weddings, funerals, and church retreats without always needing to meet with set agendas to "do business" or to make decisions. Our friend, Paulus Hartono, encouraged us to build relationships in the way of Chinese business deals—over very long meals. This quality of relationship had not been possible when the relationship with MCC happened through formal letters or tightly scheduled visits to the country with conversation done through translation.

Relationships require time. I think that people who have participated in young adult exchanges such as Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) and similar programs will lead in developing new ways of collaborative relationships across the world church. Young adults who serve and learn with a host family and a host congregation in another part of the world church do what very few people in this room could do at this point in your lives; they give almost a whole year of their lives to go and be mentored by a host community. They do not go as experts. They do not go as leaders. They do not go because they think they have something great to offer that local people do not have. They go in a very vulnerable way to learn a new language and to allow themselves to be transformed in relationships with people who are very different from themselves.

We have often heard about the value of building relationships by sitting around the table together. MWC leaders and IMA participants and others regularly meet for days at a time in different locations around the globe. But they do not have the opportunity to share in each other's regular daily lives, and they don't have "all the time in the world." In contrast, young adult participants have time to participate in the celebration times, the fun times, the boring times, and the hard times with their host communities. They wash dishes and are helped through embarrassing sicknesses. The relationships developed through YAMEN and other young adult programs will form the basis for future collaboration across the world church. Young adult programs provide a shared opportunity to establish connections, mutuality, sharing, and networking relationships that lay the foundation for the creation of new, shared action plans across the world church.

Intercultural young adult programs change the paradigm of missions. Rather than a one-directional sending of young adults out from a North American home base, a knitted together network of church communities around the world host, mentor, and disciple young adults from other parts of the world. I remember being so impressed with the way a Lao YAMEN alumni led a devo-

tional at the YAMEN re-entry retreat a few years ago. When I asked her where she had learned to preach like that, she told me her host father in India had taught her. I also remember an experienced host family in Indonesia who were so willing and ready to shape the life trajectory of young adult participants that they told us, “Send us the naughty ones.” And I remember hearing a Javanese YAMEN participant telling his church members back home about what it was like to live with his Zimbabwean host family when they were suffering to find food and yet hosted him and included him. Within the global church, I have hope that we can build relationships while appreciating our differences until we are “no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens.”

In conclusion, I offer some suggestions for North American agencies working as Outsiders in God’s mission. I hope these ideas spark conversation.

1. **First, with our long colonial history, it is time for North American agencies to take a back seat when working as a guest in another part of the world.** Development author Robert Chambers emphasized this point in the thought-provoking title of his book *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*.² For those of us who have benefited from a long history of White colonial privilege, this means intentionally and actively looking for ways to give up power and control. When we are Outsiders, we need to step back, sit down, listen, learn, and keep ourselves away from the microphone even if we are recognized in our own context as an elder, a leader, or someone with good ideas. That means that our intercultural work will begin to feel very different and unfamiliar. I am not calling us to withdraw from face-to-face relationships between Outsiders and Insiders but to consciously stand down from roles of leadership and direction even if we are invited or pushed to take the roles.
2. **Second, North American agencies working as Outsiders should carefully analyze and question their roles in relationship with Insiders.** Some questions could be:
 - Where is the control in this relationship? Is the line of supervision to Outsiders or Insiders?
 - Who has created the plans and policies that direct this work?
 - Do the roles assigned to Outsiders fit their age and experience in relation to Insiders?
 - Beyond the specific program or project, what relationships do Outsiders have with Insiders?

² London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1997.

3. **Third, North American Outsiders working with Insiders should prioritize new initiatives in which joint ownership is possible.** Ownership is different than buy-in. We often talk about buy-in as a good thing, but in the context of North American mission agencies, I think it's colonial. Buy-in happens when one group has a plan, a structure, a program, or an agency and then invites another group to join in after the fact. Buy-in also happens when Outsiders start something and then expect Insiders to step in and take it over in the way that Outsiders used to manage it so that Outsiders can move on to a new place. In contrast, I hope the world church can create something completely new together so that all parties would have an opportunity for ownership in an initiative to serve beyond ourselves.
4. **Fourth, North American agencies should carefully consider language access as a critical part of global long-term relationships.** We need to prioritize local language learning for Outsiders and Access Language learning for all of us. I used to think that English language teaching in an international context was yet another imperialistic imposition. Now, I see English as an access language—simply another tool that makes connections possible across the global church. This is especially needed for Asia, where the colonial languages of English, Spanish, and French are not widely used. I also see a need for a multidirectional translation of materials from world languages like Hindi or Korean or Bahasa Indonesia to English rather than the unidirectional flow of English language materials to other languages.
5. **Fifth, North American agencies should seriously consider the radical sharing of a significant pool of financial resources for God's mission.** What would it look like across Mennonite World Conference if each agency or denomination intentionally gave up a measure of control and identity and committed to a shared pool of funds? And what if the pooled resources were used for new jointly owned initiatives that connect us across the world church in the unity of shared action rather than the "us" and "them" of partnerships? This shared fund would be not a giving from our excess but an equitable and probably painful sharing of doing with less for our independent initiatives so we could do more together. This would be extremely messy and full of challenges, yet in the body of Christ, that's no reason not to try. If you want to go far, go together.
6. **Lastly, North American agencies should join together with other parts of the world church in exercising our imaginations.** What decentralized models haven't we thought of yet? Is the partnership model the pinnacle of the Holy Spirit's leading of our imaginations? Is the business model of partnership really the best type of relationship within the church? Do we

really need the establishment of two formalized entities in order to enter into joint action? Is partnership the best translation of “koinonia”? Wouldn’t a translation of “communion” or “fellowship” serve us better for relationships within the world church? What other models exist? While celebrating our differences, can we give up enough of our separate agency and denominational identities to allow us to act as a world communion? Rather than the “us” and “them” of global partnerships, let us become a united “WE” bearing witness to one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Global Mission Partnership: Striving to Balance Limping Alliances

BARBARA NKALA¹

Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) hosted a consultation that sought a new dispensation in fostering effective and healthy global partnerships. I believe it is very noble that MMN continues to take practical steps to ensure mutuality in mission partnerships even in the face of power imbalances that threaten to undermine good relations. Striking a good balance, however, is an enigma that seems to be slippery as an eel. This paper considers some negative effects of our colonial legacies that hinder general harmony in mutual mission, and also ponders some positive postures in the horizon for our limping mission alliances.²

Colonialism has distorted mission efforts due to legacies such as paternalistic tendencies, ongoing exploitation, the perpetration of dependency syndrome, and some effects of Western theology.

First, paternalism has perpetuated a superiority and inferiority dichotomy—the subtle arrogance of the givers and the belittling of the receivers. Digging deeper into this dichotomy, Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi presented an excellent keynote address that unfolded the dilemma of the world church members she terms “Insiders” and “Outsiders” in the partnership field.³ No one can dispute the good and beneficial work the Outsiders bring into any local community. Yet, the power imbalance paradox created by the fact that the Global North church has better access to generous financial support and other resources that they bring to the partnership table hounds and distorts an otherwise good collaboration in spreading the good news. Also, it is an indisputable fact that donor funders trust Outsiders but view Insiders with suspicion. All this hinders a graceful partnership.

1 Barbara Nkala is Mennonite World Conference regional representative for Southern Africa.

2 On the “limping” or unbalanced character of our global alliances, see my comments on Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi’s paper below.

3 Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi “The Mission of God and Global Partnerships: Assessing the Role of North American Anabaptist Agencies,” Council of International Anabaptist Mission Plenary, January 10, 2018, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN. This paper is published in this issue as “The Mission of God and Global Relationships.”

Secondly, some people in the Global South continue to reject the gospel outright because they view it as a tool of exploitation that was used to loot natural resources during the colonial period. It is unfortunate that missionaries brought the gospel at the same time that greed and rape of the colonies happened with impunity from fortune predators during the scramble for Africa.

Third, the perpetration of the begging syndrome is a curse that many African peoples have not yet wriggled out of. I was saddened and dismayed last year to listen to some African church leaders declaring failure to pay some dues and blaming it all on poverty in the region. That frame of mind sustains the image that Africa is poor, sick, and dying, and can only be saved by the mercy and aid of the Global North.⁴ Africa is not poor. Riches have for years been plundered from the Global South by the Global North. The truth is, everyone does have something to give, no matter how small. Attitudes need to change.

In my country, Zimbabwe, there is a vast difference in the spirit of giving practiced by home-grown churches and those established by missions. While the latter tend to want to look to their mother bodies for assistance, the former usually take ownership of their churches. The spirit of giving flows more freely from the home-grown churches as they use their gifts and talents to give with one mind. They have built home-grown hospitals, clinics, schools and universities, media houses, and even have foreign missions. One such church is Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI) started by Ezekiel H. Guti in Zimbabwe.⁵

I salute what the President of the Republic of Ghana espoused during the Global Partnership Education Conference in Dakar when he said, “We cannot depend on other people to finance the education of our continent.”⁶ He suggested creating policies to enhance quality education and eliminate corruption. He said that Ghana cannot continue to develop upon the charity of the West, although any help given is appreciated. People in my part of the world are tired of being looked down on and labelled as lazy, ignorant, corrupt, and drowning in poverty. More African leaders are getting encouragement from the new winds of change blowing.

⁴Mallence Bart-Williams of Sierra Leone in her presentation about the exploitation of Africa, TEDx conference in Berlin, 2005, <http://www.tedxberlin.de/tedxberlin-salon-chances-challenges-changes-development-2015-and-beyond-speakers>.

⁵FIFMI is also known as Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA). See <http://fifmi.org>.

⁶President Nana Akufo-Addo, Global Partnership for Education Conference in Dakar, Senegal, published February 5, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5H-GMVt_Z18A.

Legacy of Western Theology

Western theology came with the missionaries and had a negative impact on worship styles, dress codes, and other crucial social issues. The drum, for instance, was used in Africa to communicate and in song and dance. Somehow with Christianity came a notion that the drum was demonic. Other indigenous musical instruments were also deemed evil. In 1961, when one of the missionary doctors in our country played an accordion during a service among the Khoisan peoples, the Khoisan picked up their own musical instruments and joined in, only to have the service discontinued lest they begin to dance.⁷

Then there are social issues such as what to do with a polygamous situation after repentance of the polygamy. Early mission influence might have messed up on a way forward and kept many polygamists from church. This scenario is changing.

Another challenge has been the lack of adequate training in Bible schools or theological colleges for men and women called to ministry. Some were sent to foreign motherlands of the church to train and never returned home. Only in recent years do we have home-grown Bible schools that churn out well-trained preachers. I was excited to see the Africa Bible Commentary with contributions by seventy African scholars and theologians. The volume provides an African biblical perspective that is very helpful to pastors in the continent. Availability and purchasing power, however, are limited. That is where partnership may come in handy.

Dr. John Edmund Haggai, a North American leadership guru, was endowed with a vision years ago to train indigenous leaders who would then go back to their countries to train their own people locally. The Haggai Institute logo said, “Training leaders globally to impact their world locally.” That is good partnership in missions work.

Challenges Presented by Money and Power

In most of our African countries, the challenge presented by money and power is compounded by poverty, famine, disease, political oppression, and a myriad of other problems. These challenges lend themselves to corruption, nepotism, succession issues, and the “eating” syndrome. The former first lady in my country made us a laughing-stock by boasting that she would wheel the former President Mugabe, at 94 years old, in a wheelbarrow to campaign and

⁷ Barbara Nkala, ed., *Celebrating the Vision: A Century of Sowing and Reaping* (Bulawayo: Brethren in Christ Church, 1998), 46. The gospel that missionaries brought to the peoples of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) stopped dancing that accompanied singing during services, as dancing was associated with ancestral spirit worship.

continue ruling. Is there a chance for global mission partnerships under senile governance?

There is also the challenge of a proliferation of the prosperity gospel preachers. People have seen over the years that money spells power, and so they naively flock to false prophets who propound a pseudo gospel that no longer preaches servant leadership and dying to self, but rather a gospel that appeals to the flesh and feeds the power and ego.

In my country, we generally had a poor theology about money. As I grew up, business people were considered sinners who used magic to obtain their riches. The Bible story about Lazarus and the rich man⁸ did not help matters. When my husband decided to go into business, I was very discouraging to him because of the teaching that “Money is the root of all evil” was supposed to be scriptural.⁹ Things have since improved in people’s attitudes toward money, but many of our people need to understand that money is a tool to be used positively and creatively. Mission work requires money to thrive.

Money and power also tend to dictate how and where to use the resources received. I was once involved as part of a team that was writing school texts to teach about HIV and AIDS. A foreign donor was paying good money for the project. But I had to drop out and leave the team because some of the ideas the donor was expecting us to include in the texts communicated values that were foreign and unacceptable in our culture and in my belief system. One of my friends said, “You are quitting and losing out! The money is good. Just write what they want.” But for me, it was not about money. Hence, I subscribe to what Stanley Green called the need to develop a self-critical posture of one’s motivations in partnership work.¹⁰

Understand the New Dispensation

I am cognizant of the pregnant statement that an Insider said to one of the Outsiders: “We need you to sit down while we stand up.”¹¹ For me, these words are a cry for recognition, a cry for mutual respect, a cry to regain lost dignity. African governments are tired and suspicious of wrong motives that continue to be exploitative, hence they have become wary of granting visas or work permits to Outsiders, except for transfer of knowledge and technology. Good

⁸ Luke 16:19–31.

⁹ This is a widely used scriptural misquote. The correct scripture is: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Tim 6:10, NIV).

¹⁰ Stanley Green, CIM devotional, January 10, 2018. Stanley highlighted that the foundation of partnership is Christ Himself.

¹¹ Stanley Green, quoting an emerging leader’s response to a question about what the Insiders need the Outsider partner to be as they collaborate in work.

partnership calls for training and equipping the receivers to develop in such a way that enables self-sustainability when the donors move out. Also, there should be no strings attached, except accountability and transparency.

Conclusion

A limping alliance is not the best solution in the new dispensation. Those who are at the receiving end need to work toward self-sufficiency. The receivers need to take a leaf from the Chinese legend that tells the story of a wise man and his disciple who were afforded hospitality by a poor family with only one cow—a cow that provided their daily sustenance. On departing from the poor family's dwelling, the wise man instructed his disciple to push the prized cow over the cliff. Despite being riven with guilt, the disciple obeyed his master. Many years later, the guilty and remorseful disciple returned to the poor family's shack to check on their welfare. He feared the worst, only to find that there had been an amazing transformation in the lives of this family after their prized cow had died. Perhaps the “prized cow” of paternalism needs to be taken away in order for the rich rewards of self-sufficiency and innovation to take hold in Africa!

Reclaiming Mission: Reflections on Mission as Global Interconnectedness and Spirit-Empowered Evangelism

ANICKA FAST¹

I enjoyed participating in the panel “Perspectives from emerging leaders” at the Council of International Anabaptist Ministries 2018 plenary meeting. Here, I offer a selection from some of my actual responses to the questions asked by moderator Jamie Pitts, as well as some additional responses I had prepared but did not share at the time.

Share a significant experience that has given you perspective about global mission partnerships.

As the daughter of parents who worked as missionary Bible translators in Papua New Guinea, I spent part of my childhood living on a large, fenced compound where several hundred expatriate missionaries lived alongside a few hundred more Papua New Guinean employees. I relatively often heard expatriate missionaries justify the task of Bible translation through appeal to an eschatological vision of many peoples, tribes, nations, and languages praising God together. They argued that making the Bible available to new people groups had value because it helped to bring this vision to fruition—essentially saying that Bible translation contributed to the fullness of the global church. However, this discourse about a global and multicultural church contrasted with the almost completely segregated worship that took place on Sunday mornings, where missionaries and Papua New Guineans worshipped separately for the most part. The incongruity I felt then has stuck with me ever since and has played a big part in leading me to theological studies that focus on ecclesiology.

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I tell this story not because the segregated church in Papua New Guinea is that different from segregated churches in many other contexts, but as a way to focus our attention on the very basic question of what the church is and why it exists. To put it simply, I think there is something very important about how we define the church in relation to aspects of our human identities—cultural, racial, and political—and in relation to our concrete, everyday practices. Does the universal church consist of a set of culturally homogeneous groups that exist separately side by side until they finally get to rub shoulders in front of God's throne at the end of time, or are those cultural boundaries supposed to be transcended on earth at the most local level? Talking about mission really means nothing more or less than talking about what the church is, what it should look like, and how it relates to our human identities and practices. A definition of mission I like to use is that mission is about the church crossing boundaries in a way that leads to the formation of a new and universal humanity. This means that crossing the boundary from unfaith to faith for the first time, and overcoming boundaries and divisions that separate us inside the body of Christ, are both part of the same process of mission. Therefore, as we think about mission, it is essential to pay attention to the way we relate to other members of the body of Christ outside our own local context.

As the center of gravity for the global church and global mission has shifted from north to south, what are roles that north agencies and workers can play in this new reality?

I have recently begun to gently question the discourse that frames the southward demographic shift of world Christianity, by using terms such as “new heartlands” or “new centers of gravity.”² This is not because I question the reality or significance of this demographic shift but because I wonder if equating a demographic change simplistically with a change in patterns of influence runs the risk of overlooking ongoing power inequalities. Robert Wuthnow has argued in a 2009 book that a truer narrative of global Christianity would recognize the numerical growth of Christianity in the Global South while also noting the ongoing influence of the Western church, the challenge of economic

2 One of the most dramatic presentations of this demographic shift as a new “Christendom” was made by Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2002). However, Wilbert Shenk became one of the earliest voices in the academy calling attention to the new demographics of world Christianity and to the implications of this new reality for historiography. Others were Dana Robert and Lamin Sanneh. See Wilbert R. Shenk, “Toward a Global Church History,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 2 (April 1996): 50–57; Dana L. Robert, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 50–58.

disparity in the world church, and the ongoing vitality of the Western missionary movement.³ While I think there is much value theologically in emphasizing the importance and the gifts of sister churches in the Global South, this should not depend on their numbers. I think it is important to keep on following what is happening sociologically by using a global church lens. This includes tracing the flows of money, people, and information inside the global church in order to explore what global interconnectedness looks like concretely and what role transnational networks play in the world church. In short, I think it can be useful to frame what is happening in terms of new kinds of interconnectedness on a global scale while recognizing much continuity with the past.

I would encourage us all—north and south—to be creative about new forms of relational interconnectedness. Mutually transformative relationships between Mennonites in north and south have been developed over decades through the work of long-term missionaries as well as in Mennonite World Conference (MWC) assemblies, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) service work, the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP), and church-to-church connections. As we move forward, I hope to see more and not fewer of these kinds of connections, further and deeper ecclesiological reflection on the global church, and more jointly created and owned transnational structures of collaboration.

How do you see the institutionalization of mission and how that might be different in the future?

My biggest hope is that we can develop something that is more jointly owned. The word “ownership” is all about power. Sometimes I wonder if power-sharing in mission means moving toward a more centralized approach that helps to transcend nationalism. Let me give a historical example from the Catholic Church.

During the sixteenth century, Spain and Portugal had strong control of missionary efforts occurring in “their” new territories. This meant they could make sure that missionaries working in these areas did not do anything to undermine their agenda of exploitation and profit. This led to disastrous results in places like Latin America, Congo, and the Philippines. When *Propaganda Fide* was created in 1622, it provided a way for the pope to try to take back control over missions and make them less nationalistic. Richard Gray is a historian of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century papacy, who argues that this centralization of power in the papacy was shaped by the appeals of Ethiopians and Kongolese Christians. Through letters and envoys, they helped the pope become conscious of the slave trade, and appealed for missionaries that were

3 Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

not appointed by Portugal.⁴ Gray also argues that the Propaganda, which was a little like a centralized mission board for the entire Catholic Church, played a role in supporting liberation from colonial rule in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Centralizing the control over mission so that it did not get tied up with nationalist goals was a key move that the Catholic Church discerned back in the seventeenth century.

We are not Catholics, we don't have a pope, and Mennonites were concerned when MWC was formed that it not become a "super-church."⁵ Nevertheless, I sometimes wonder if an organization like MWC could have the potential to play some kind of coordinating, centralizing role in mission among Mennonites. MWC played an important role in sponsoring the Global Mennonite History project. Part of the church's mission is to tell its story accurately. Now perhaps it's time for MWC to take another step forward. What would it look like if MWC became the carrier of international missionary efforts by all Anabaptist member churches? Could this be a way to avoid the power disparity that dogs the churches when powerful, well-funded mission and service organizations from one region continue to control the mission agenda? As Jeanne Jantzi pointed out in her presentation, currently MWC seems to be a place where we are all insiders in a way because we all own MWC equally.⁶ I think the name for that structure that allows us all to be insiders is simply *church*. Is the current organization, structure, or even existence of our agencies preventing us from experiencing church, and, by extension, from participating in its mission?

How should mission institutions engage the perceived "religious relativism" of the younger generations?

Let me begin by describing the admittedly stereotypical relativistic young person I have in mind when answering this question. I'm thinking about people in their 20s and 30s (I'm 38)—people who are my age or, more likely, a decade younger, and who tend to equate mission with colonialism and to see it as something bad, embarrassing, or passé. They are very sensitive to power inequities and use the language of sin to name structural, corporate sins of sexual abuse, militarization, and nationalism. They feel uncomfortable with the idea of conversion because it seems to be linked to coercion and colonialism. They

4 Richard Gray, *Christianity, the Papacy, and Mission in Africa*, ed. Lamin O. Sanneh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012).

5 John A. Lapp and Ed van Straten, "Mennonite World Conference, 1925–2000: From Euro-American Conference to Worldwide Communion," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 77, no. 1 (January 2003): 7–45.

6 See in this issue Jeanne Zimmerly Jantzi, "The Mission of God and Global Partnerships."

have gotten a heavy dose of postcolonial theory in their undergraduate studies, which has taught them that missionaries were closely connected to the colonial enterprise in the past. However, they know very little about what mission work looks like in the present. How should members and representatives of mission institutions engage these people? It's tricky. I have eight ideas about what to try, not necessarily in order of priority:

1. Recognize the problematic aspects of Mennonite mission and mission in general. Missionaries have often, probably always, communicated a gospel tainted by their ethnocentrism. They regularly took for granted and benefited from the violence of a colonial nation-state. This was the case for Mennonite missionaries in much the same way as it was for other Protestants. Postcolonial theory has made a major contribution in helping to identify the conversion narrative that helped drive the colonial enterprise and in showing how and why this constituted an abuse of power in many cases. I like the way Congolese philosopher Valentin Mudimbe puts it. He argues that Westerners—be they colonial administrators, anthropologists, or missionaries—were strongly driven in their relationships with Africans by a paradigm of conversion. This means they continually assumed the need for the evolution or conversion of the African from a primitive or pagan to a civilized or Christian state.⁷ It also meant that African choices to convert were embedded in a subtly coercive matrix.⁸ This is a powerful analysis that helps with understanding how many Westerners—missionaries or not—have interacted with others while holding to the subtle assumption that they are out to improve them somehow, to change them into something else. One can see this paradigm at work still, in many ways, including in the academy as Western scholars interact with non-Western ones. It is helpful to recognize this. No young person should get the impression that today's North American Mennonite missionaries are ignorant of the power imbalances in the world. Even if a missionary is sure she knows this much better than the young upstart, take the time to say it; be humble. I think this is a necessary starting point. But don't stop here!
2. We also have to insist that those from the Global South who converted to Christianity as a result of missionary work did so because they wanted to. Yes,

7 V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, African Systems of Thought (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

8 Achille Mbembe, *Afriques indociles: Christianisme, pouvoir et État en société postcoloniale*, Collection Chrétiens en liberté (Paris: Karthala, 1988), 40; Karen E. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 101.

human experience is a complicated mix of coercion, appropriation, domination, and resistance. But within this mix, if we want to respect the agency of Christians from the Global South, we must recognize their conversions as real. The bulk of the growth of the church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has happened since decolonization.⁹ If the younger generation wants to throw around critiques of mission that claim missionaries were forcing conversion onto others, we can gently remind them to be ready to listen to the voices of those who chose to convert. And those voices are insisting on the agency of Christians in the Global South and on the authenticity of their decisions. The way we tell the story of mission subtly communicates or denies this agency. If we narrate the story of mission as one of Western actors transmitting the gospel to others, we are falling into the trap of denying the agency of non-Western Christians or relegating it to false consciousness. One of the most famous analyses of missions and colonialism was that of Jean and John Comaroff, who argued in relation to nineteenth-century southern Africa that missionaries were the “vanguard” of the imperial presence through their inculcation of the “everyday forms of the colonizing culture,” and that African conversion to Christianity represented false consciousness in response to missionary and Western hegemony.¹⁰ Many African Christians vehemently deny this analysis and find it deeply offensive. Lamin Sanneh, for example, says the Comaroffs make Africans into “double victims” by insisting on denying both their agency and their consciousness.¹¹ In his revisionist perspective of mission history in Africa, Sanneh constantly reminds his readers of the ways in which the power of the gospel affected not only the Africans but the missionaries as well, leading to “intercultural breakthrough” in ways that problematize any simplistic casting of missionaries as villains and continually call for new intercultural partnerships across boundaries.¹² Along with many other historians, he insists that the story of mission has to focus on appropriation rather than transmission, so as to do justice both to the agency of those who chose to convert and to the ways

9 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70.

10 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5, 308, 251.

11 Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*, Oxford Studies in World Christianity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 137–38.

12 Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations*, 149.

- that mission changed those who participated in it.¹³
3. We must help young people to not adopt an attitude of superiority toward the past. Studying history, or maybe just getting a little older, helps us see that people in the past are not that different from us. Just like us, they were aware of some structural inequalities and tried hard to address them. Just like us, they were blind to some aspects of their privilege and power. Just like us, they tended to believe that others needed to change to become more like them. It's important to educate the younger generation about the fact that certain strands of the mission of the Mennonite church over the past one hundred years have been explicit responses to the same concerns that young, missionally ambivalent Mennonites hold today. For example, as Steven Nolt's research shows, the role of MCC in the second half of the twentieth century developed as a form of resistance to nationalist and Cold War narratives about American identity. It was about rejecting narratives of empire, not only by refusing to participate in warfare during the Korean and Vietnam wars but also by creating alternative patterns of relationship that concretely disrupted those nationalist boundaries.¹⁴ Young Mennonites today may be able to relate to this. This is just one example. Mennonite missionary methods with African Independent Churches in western and southern Africa are another.¹⁵ And such examples do not exist only among Mennonites. In Southern Africa, missionaries were often hated by white settlers because they continued to recognize gospel equality of white and black.¹⁶ Protestant missionaries developed anti-racism dis-

13 Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations*, 131. See also Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); J. F. Ade Ajayi and E. A. Ayande, "Writing African Church History," in *The Church Crossing Frontiers: Essays on the Nature of Mission; In Honour of Bengt Sundkler*, eds. Peter Beyerhaus and Carl F. Hallencreutz, Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia, 11 (Lund: Gleerup, 1969), 90–108.

14 Steven M. Nolt, "Globalizing a Separate People: World Christianity and North American Mennonites, 1940–1990," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 4 (October 2010): 487–506.

15 See David A. Shank, "Anabaptists and Mission," in *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, ed. James R. Krabill (Elkhart, IN; Scottdale, PA: Institute of Mennonite Studies; copublished with Herald, 2010), 269–94; and David A. Shank, "Qualities that Enable Mennonites to Relate to African-Initiated Churches," in *Mission from the Margins*, 337–38.

16 Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*, 145; Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South*

course before anyone else did. Edmund Soper, who wrote a book in the 1940s that is widely acknowledged to herald the beginning of the recognition of the systemic nature of racism, was a mission professor at Garrett Biblical Institute.¹⁷ In fact, as careful research by Dana Robert has demonstrated, missionaries played a major role in launching and disseminating postcolonial consciousness in the first place!¹⁸ It might be comforting to the younger generation to become aware that they are not the first people to think about how to resist imperialism and nationalism effectively.

On the flip side of recognizing the value of missionary work in the past, we can also help young people recognize that their valid critiques of the past also often apply to the present. They might be right to point out that early missionaries were powerful enough to dictate the terms of relationship with local people and that this distorted relationships. They might be right when they point out that the old mission structures helped to perpetuate a significant power imbalance. But do they think things are any different today? At worst, our tendency to write off mission can cause us to fall into the same ethnocentric trap of the early missionaries—we only want to have relationship when it can happen on *our* terms. This dilemma has come up recently for Canadian Mennonites, as they have moved toward a much smaller national church structure following the recommendations of the Future Directions Task Force.¹⁹ Some have predicted that within the new structure there will be less funding for international witness, and fewer long-term workers.²⁰ If this turns out to be the case, Mennonite Church Canada's international partners could legitimately ask, "If you are withdrawing from the relationship now because you don't have a lot of money anymore, then is that all that kept you here before?" When Canadian Mennonites withdraw

Africa, Reconsiderations in Southern African History (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

17 Edmund Davison Soper, *Racism: A World Issue* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1947).

18 Dana L. Robert, "Missiology and Postcolonial Consciousness," in *Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of Christian Theology*, eds. Sarah Coakley and Richard Cross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), Part 1.c.

19 For more information about the Future Directions process that began in 2012 within Mennonite Church Canada, please see <http://home.mennonitechurch.ca/fd/about>.

20 "Witness Workers Bring Forth Concerns about 'Future Directions,'" *Canadian Mennonite* 20, January 27, 2016, <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/stories/witness-workers-bring-forth-concerns-about-future-directions>.

- from relationships with international partners because they have less funds, are they not communicating that they only want to relate when they have enough power to steer the relationship in a certain direction?
4. Just get people together as much as possible. Pour as much money as possible into connections and facilitating relationships, MCC- and MWC-style. People are affected for life by formative experiences and exchanges during young adulthood. Those relationships contribute to the development of a new kind of people in the world, one with a confused identity that transcends nationalism.²¹ Also, get people together across the boundary of time by educating them about the past. Help them examine and analyze real historical situations and case studies. There is, to some extent, a suspicion of mission that comes directly from ignorance. Young Mennonites often have no idea what North American Mennonite mission agencies are actually doing on the ground or have actually done in the past. They do not get confronted with the thick messiness of actual relationships.
 5. Confront them with the question, “If mission is such a mess, what are you going to do about it? How are you going to relate differently to people on the other side of the world?” My challenge to the young people is to say that you cannot critique mission as colonial without being prepared to do something different—and once you try to do that, you will recognize how Mennonites have been trying in various ways to resist imperialism and nationalism over the past century, just as you will recognize how northern Mennonites in both past and present have been complicit with imperialism. Those who are teachers: help young people read and engage with voices from the Global South. Help them see that just using postcolonial discourse is not as effective in creating equitable relationships as actually relating to the real ideas being expressed by sisters and brothers in the Global South.
 6. Get to the pain point. Once young, relativistic Mennonites from North America start relating to brothers and sisters from the Global South, they might struggle with feeling unrelated to these Mennonites because of different theological convictions about things like sexuality, atonement, or demon possession. But they might also be surprised to find out what they do have in common. The Global Anabaptist Profile surveyed a representative sample of worldwide Anabaptist churches between 2013 and 2015, asking questions about members’ adherence to the seven shared convictions of

21 Emmanuel Katongole, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

MWC.²² When I showed some of these results to my students in a required mission class—students whom I would consider to be ambivalent about mission—they were fascinated. Their preconceived ideas about what divided northern and southern Christians and what they had in common were very different from what the data showed. This is a good example of how a little bit of interaction with data can go a long way for those who remain ignorant about much of what is actually happening in the global church.

7. Don't stop using the word mission, but use it in ways that emphasize the convergence that is emerging between Anabaptist ecclesiology and Anabaptist missiology. There is no other word that will do. We need to claim this word with its world church connotations, based in an Anabaptist ecclesiology. As Wilbert Shenk argues, there has been, for historical reasons, a disconnect between Mennonite peace theology and ethics that burgeoned in North America from the 1920s onward, and specifically Mennonite mission theology that only developed after the 1970s.²³ Yet there is a major overlap between the two. An older generation of Mennonite scholars, such as David A. Shank, John H. Yoder, and Wilbert Shenk, have repeatedly made the point that the mission of the church is to be the church.²⁴ Yoder is one of these older scholars who explicitly spelled out this connection between Anabaptist ecclesiology and mission in global church terms. In his lectures on mission at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in the 1970s, he connected the missionary movement and the global church as two stages in a larger narrative of mission as boundary-crossing. Yoder reminded his students that inviting others to cross boundaries from unbelief to belief is just a first step, "a way to get the concern for relationship started." The same mission of the church, marked by the same conviction that "all peoples . . . are one in Christ" calls for ongoing links, exchanges, and connections between Christians around the world.²⁵ Today, a younger generation of MWC leaders is making these kinds of arguments in relation to a global Menno-

22 Conrad Kanagy, Elizabeth Miller, and John D. Roth, *Global Anabaptist Profile: Belief and Practice in 24 Mennonite World Conference Churches* (Goshen, IN: Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism, 2017).

23 Wilbert R. Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions, 1850–1999* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), 65.

24 Anicka Fast, "The Earth Is the Lord's: Anabaptist Mission as Boundary-Crossing Global Ecclesiology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90 (July 2016): 303–14.

25 John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, eds. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 169–74, 179.

nite church. They are arguing that participating in the global church offers opportunities to experience a kind of transnational citizenship and to unlearn patterns of participation in empire. They are saying that a focus on the congregation as the most important manifestation of church is a heresy and that being the church in a way that transcends nationalism means entering into global church relationships.²⁶ If the mission of the church is to be the church, then escaping from nationalist idolatry means being church globally. This is something I would expect to resonate with a younger generation, and I would encourage them to recognize the contribution of older scholars in bringing them to this awareness.

8. Invite them to conversion! Since the 1960s, the church has been exploding in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In no way can this phenomenon be interpreted as the spread of an imperialistic, Westernized form of Christianity. If we believe there is only one Spirit and only one God, we cannot ignore that this Spirit is being poured out over Asia, Africa, and Latin America, stimulating the vibrant growth of a movement that looks a lot like the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement that we are so proud of claiming allegiance to, especially in terms of its strong focus on the Holy Spirit and its strong evangelistic zeal.²⁷ If we in the Global North isolate ourselves from what God is doing in the rest of the world, it's not that the church will die—it is alive and well elsewhere—but we might be withdrawing from it. Maybe don't start with this point, but do get to it! In the global relationships into which missionaries entered so imperfectly lay, against all odds, their only hope of experiencing the good news. Much as we might want to distance ourselves from the whole enterprise, the same truth applies to us.

26 César García, "Human Rights, the State and the Global Mennonite Community," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 32 (2014): 11–21; César García, "A Vision for Global Mission amidst Shifting Realities," *Anabaptist Witness* 1, no. 1 (October 2014): 27–36; Larry Miller, "Some Thoughts about a Well-Entrenched Mennonite Assumption," in *What Mennonites Are Thinking, 1999*, eds. Merle Good and Phyllis Pellman Good (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1999), 168–69; Nolt, "Globalizing a Separate People," 495–96; John D. Roth, "What Hath Zurich To Do with Addis Ababa? Ecclesial Identity in the Global Anabaptist Church," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 31, no. 1 (2013): 32, 34–35.

27 Conrad L. Kanagy, Tilahun Beyene, and Richard Showalter, *Winds of the Spirit: A Profile of Anabaptist Churches in the Global South* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2012), 228. See also the essays in Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *Anabaptism and Mission*, Missionary Studies No. 10 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1984) for research demonstrating the evangelistic outreach of early Anabaptists.

We Were Not Disobedient to the Vision

RICHARD SHOWALTER¹

On January 9, 1997, on the campus of the Mennonite World Conference meeting in Delhi, India, the International Missions Association (IMA) was officially born. Four mission groups representing Anabaptist circles of churches on four continents banded together to “pray for each other, learn from each other, and partner as God leads in cross-cultural missions to the unreached peoples of the world.”

Of course, long before 1997, the IMA began differently in the lives of each of us who were involved in those first meetings. For me it began as a four-year-old when I went to New York City with my parents to say good-bye to the Chester and Sara Jane Wenger family who were leaving for Ethiopia as missionaries. It continued when I met Ralph Winter at the Fuller School of World Missions and saw the importance of mission leadership, not only local church leadership, from the Global South. It continued when I met Kenyans in the United States, like Henry Mulandi, who took me back to Africa with them and I saw the birth of a grassroots Kenyan mission movement. And it especially continued in 1994, 1995, and 1996 when I began to meet Eastern Mennonite Mission’s (EMM’s) mission partners in Honduras, Ethiopia, and Indonesia and I realized that they had things to remind us and teach us about missions—some of which we had never learned and others we were in danger of forgetting.

I don’t know exactly where it began for Pak Abdi, Bedru Hussein, Rene Penalba, David Shenk, and, later, others who joined us in those early days. I only know that it began much longer ago than twenty years. Truth be told, I believe it began at Pentecost.

In those first 1997 meetings, the continents were Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America. The mission groups were the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC), the mission arm of Ethiopia; Pekabaran Injil dan Pelayanan Kasih (PIPKA), the mission arm of Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI); the mission leader of Amor Viviente of Honduras; and Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), the mission arm of Lancaster Conference and related groups in the United States.

1 *Richard Showalter lives and travels in Asia, Africa, the United States, and beyond as a teacher, preacher, writer, and servant.*

We held our first annual meeting in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, later that year in August. Since then, we have met every year except three, which had been scheduled for Indonesia (1999), Israel (2009), and Honduras (2014). These meetings have been held in ten countries on five continents—Honduras, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the United States, Tanzania, the Philippines, Germany, India, Kenya, and Singapore. If the IMA continues to exist for another twenty years, I hope we can add at least ten more countries to that list. Among those we should consider are Peru, Israel, South Korea, Mexico, Guatemala, Uganda, Nigeria, Turkey, Switzerland, and Morocco—to name only a few.

The guiding vision for the IMA from its beginning is threefold:

- a fellowship for mission leaders representing Anabaptist churches;
- praying for each other, learning from each other, partnering with each other;
- taking the good news to the least-reached peoples of the world.

Or, as I said in November 1997, our core convictions are “prayer, dependence on the Spirit, the centrality of the Great Commission in our missions, and taking the good news to those who have not yet heard.”

1. First, we identified “mission leaders” as the group that should gather. We knew that when church leaders gather, they have many pressing issues to consider—Biblical faithfulness in every part of life, theological correctness, church polity, church discipline, training institutions, the care of widows and orphans, personal and corporate relationship with God, and many more issues, all of them important. We wanted to establish a group with singular focus—intercultural mission.
2. Second, we identified the importance of fellowship in prayer, learning from each other, and partnering as the Holy Spirit leads. We soon began not only to pray but also to fast together. We knew that the newer churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America had much to teach the older churches of North America and Europe. We knew that the Great Commission is just as much for Africans as for Europeans, for Asians as for North Americans. We knew that in many cases, we Westerners had more to learn in mission from our brothers and sisters in the Global South than they from us. And we wanted to partner, truly partner, in new ways.
3. Third, we wanted to maintain a special focus on going to peoples and places where the church did not yet exist, the least-reached peoples of the world. As Oswald Smith of Toronto asked many years ago, “Why should anyone hear the gospel twice when there are some who have not heard it once?” We knew that this meant intercultural mission, whether in our own countries or abroad. We knew that it meant incarnational mission—learning new languages, going to difficult and unreceptive places, getting outside our com-

fort zones. And we believed that we could encourage and help each other as we went.

By the grace of God, we have not been disobedient to that vision. Yes, sometimes we have lost sight of it. Sometimes we have faltered and fallen. But for the past twenty years, we have been renewed year by year as we've gathered.

We have partnered, and that partnership has been expressed in a multitude of little and big ways. We have partnered in encouragement, in testimony, in finances, in prayer, and in prophetic words of direction. Sometimes we have done program together, but our partnership has gone far beyond mere program. Soul friendships have blossomed among us. Whole new directions in our ministries have emerged. Lives are being changed. Countries are being impacted.

We were not disobedient to the heavenly vision

- when we were on our faces before the Lord in Honduras saying, Yes, by your grace we are ready to die for your sake and for those who have not yet heard.
- when in the Philippines we enrolled together in the University of the Holy Spirit, signing our names on a whiteboard.
- when finances for frontier mission began to travel from Southeast Asia to Africa and the Middle East, and they're still traveling today.
- when on multiple occasions a brother from Asia challenged us to begin living by faith, abandoning ourselves in fresh ways to the God who provides.
- when I've left these meetings, year after year, challenged to the core of my being to go back home to walk out this kingdom life in Christ in generosity, faith, and persistent love—against all odds.
- when a young Nepali attended an IMA meeting and went back home with a new awareness that he and his church, too, were called to mission.
- when bishops from Lancaster Mennonite Conference (LMC) said, "We have many conferences on peacemaking in our country. Couldn't we have a conference on the Holy Spirit in mission?" That vision did not die, and the next year in Ethiopia the first Holy Spirit in Mission conference was held as a part of IMA, and it has never stopped. This year is the tenth, I think.
- when we gave each other seminars on what we've learned about mission—Honduras, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and the United States. Though we no longer give the formal seminars every year, we have never stopped learning from each other.
- when a bishop from the Kenya Mennonite Church came as a guest to the IMA. We inquired whether KMC wanted to become a member. He

said, “We’re not ready yet, but give us a couple years, and we’ll be back.”

- when we were asked, do you have to be a mission board to join? And we said no! If your whole church understands itself to be on this mission, just send whichever mission leader can represent you in that mission. Amor Viviente has been like that from the beginning.
- when LMC leaders and other church leaders connected with IMA joined us in Kenya in 2010 to meet other leaders from around the globe. IMA continued with its agenda, and the church leaders to whom we are accountable met for theirs.
- when 3,000 ordinary Kenyan believers headed north to some of the wildest, conflict-prone regions of their nation this summer to share the gospel with anyone who would listen. The whole Kenyan church is being impacted by this missional vision.

And now, almost everywhere I go in the world, I see the ripple effects of living out IMA’s vision, and I rejoice.

So we celebrate twenty years tonight. But let’s never forget that our primary celebration is not of some human institution like IMA. IMA can come and go.

Rather, we celebrate because we’re a little part of a great kingdom movement that has circled the globe for millennia:

- it was already a movement 4,000 years ago when God told Abram, “I’m going to bless all the clans of the world through you” (see Genesis 12:3).
- it was already a movement when the voice spoke from heaven at Jesus’s baptism, “You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11, NASB).
- it was already a movement when Jesus told the eleven, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18–19, NIV).
- it was already a movement when Paul wrote to the Romans, “I made it my goal to preach where the gospel had not yet been proclaimed” (see Romans 15:20).
- it was already a movement for captives to the wild Germans (257), Anbaram in Ethiopia (300s), Patrick in Ireland (400s), an Armenian among the Turks of Central Asia (500s), unnamed Berbers in North Africa (200–600), and hundreds of others today who are going, going, going.

The Mission of God and Global Partnership

Case Study: International Missions Association (IMA)

YESAYA ABDI & TILAHUN BEYENE KIDANE¹

The International Missions Association (IMA) is an association of Anabaptist mission bodies established for prayer, mutual support, and partnership in carrying out the Great Commission. Four member groups created the association in 1997: Pengutusan Injil dan Pelayanan Kasih (PIPKA) of Indonesia, Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) of Ethiopia, Amor Viviente of Honduras, and Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) of the United States. It has since grown to a membership of twenty-four and includes mission and church groups from the United States, the Philippines, Tanzania, Kenya, Nepal, Singapore, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

In 1997, Richard Showalter became the first IMA President. We thank God for his servant leadership of treating all members as peers in mission, a model that we have continued to use. Tan Kok Beng, a mission leader from Singapore who has trained and sent thousands of missionaries from many countries, almost all over the world, through Asia Pacific Mission, Ltd., once remarked, “I have attended many international mission meetings, but I never quite felt I was accepted as a peer of the Western leaders until I came to the IMA. Here we all stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder.”

In 2010, Richard expressed his desire to pass the baton to another person. When the nominating committee contacted me (Yesaya Abdi), wanting to recommend me to the general assembly of IMA as the next president, I struggled very much. But as I spent time in prayer, the Lord impressed upon my heart that IMA is God’s instrument and that God is its head and I should not hesitate to accept the call. Subsequently, I was elected by the assembly at IMA 2010 in Kenya, then re-elected for a second term in Singapore in 2013 and a third term in Germany in 2016.

When IMA met in Medan, Indonesia, in 2011, all participants received a carving made of wood in the form of three persons carrying a globe with three words written at the base: “Pray, Play, and Pay” together. It reflected the

¹ *Yesaya Abdi is president of the International Mission Association (IMA), and Tilahun Beyene Kidane is the IMA coordinator.*

conviction of all IMA members to relate to each other equally and interdependently. We need each other's support, fellowship, and partnership to carry out the global mission God has entrusted to us. Based on this understanding, the Executive Board of IMA does not hesitate to encourage its members to share whatever they have. Over time, the IMA members have reached a level where they have to cover their own airfares to come to the annual gathering, and some even go beyond that and give contributions toward the general expenses of the Association.

The Executive Board and all IMA members are very excited to see how God is working among us as more and more members catch the vision from the Lord. The three stories listed below attest to the stirring of the Spirit among us.

After attending the 2005 annual gathering in Indonesia, Mosa Tamang from Nepal said: "If God could bring me to Indonesia, God can certainly send and use me anywhere." He is now engaged in doing God's mission.

Kennedy Mbatia of Thika Deliverance Church, Kenya, after attending the IMA Conference in Indonesia in 2005 and impressed with what PIPKA was doing, planting many mission posts, wanted to have a mission outreach but had no resources to do so. God spoke to him, saying, "Spend your church building funds to buy a bus to take friends to do outreach somewhere. When you take care of the lost spiritual 'stones,' God will take care of the bricks for your church building project."

Brother Kennedy obeyed. That year he bought a bus of 52 seats and took his friends to do mission. He did it faithfully, year by year. As a result of this obedience, his church became alive—vibrant in prayer and generous in giving—and many lost souls continue to flock into the Kingdom. In the meantime, a church building of 1,600 seats was constructed; it was completed and dedicated to the Lord in December 2014.

To accommodate the significant progress of mission movement, he then forming Global Outreach Missions. Last year, he mobilized and went with 700 soul-winners in 34 buses. And this month, August 19 to 27, 2018, they will go to the South counties, with thousands of missionaries in 60 buses. This has now become a yearly tradition, attracting more and more persons for the annual outreach and the salvation of many.

Bishop Henry Mulandi of African Christian Mission International, Kenya, heard from God as he was praying at IMA 2012 in the lakeside of Hawassa, Ethiopia. God spoke to him, saying that he had been unfaithful to his calling and that within the last eight years there had not been any new church plant. So Brother Henry asked God's forgiveness and changed his ways. Since then, some four churches have been planted. Today his church has an open-air evangelism rally and also reaches out to high school students with the message of the gospel once a week. They are seeing some amazing results. God provided them with a long trailer truck for the purpose of this outreach.

So what really is IMA? It is an Anabaptist mission association in which all members are co-equal, walking in partnership with one another. The IMA Executive Board is just a facilitator as we seek guidance and direction from the Lord and walk in obedience. Our tool and what holds us together as we seek vision from the Lord is *prayer*. We have dedicated the first Friday of each month for our joint prayer and fasting day. That day we share our joys, praises, burdens, and needs as we hold hands in prayer around the globe. It has been a blessed and rewarding journey where we could truly say along with Paul that we have not been “disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19, NRSV). And even in this, we depend totally on His mercy and grace alone.

All glory to God!

The Increasing Need for Authentic Global Anabaptist Partnerships

RUTH KEIDEL CLEMENS¹

Our world faces the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II in 1945. Twenty million people face starvation, according to the United Nations, without an immediate injection of funds. Sixty-eight million people are fleeing war and persecution as refugees, asylum seekers, or those displaced in their own country. Experts in the NGO world say that the increased complexity of global issues requires greater collaboration and partnership to bring about sustainable change in the world.

Each of our Anabaptist mission and service agencies in the United States and Canada needs to stay relevant for our constituencies and supporters, many of whom overlap. Considering our shrinking and splitting denominations, partnership among these mission and service agencies can become more challenging.

How might we “set a table” that clearly recognizes and openly acknowledges what each agency brings to address the needs of the world?

- As US and Canadian mission and service agencies?
- As the Global Anabaptist Service Network?
- As Anabaptist churches in the Global South?
- As the global Anabaptist community as a whole?

What is the niche we each bring to the table? What is our unique expertise? What are the relational and community connections we bring? How might we support one another in recognizing the gifts we each bring to the table, so we can more adequately address the immense needs in our world today?

In 2002, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Board determined that MCC’s International Program should transition to primarily a local partnership model as its preferred mode of operation and move away from projects

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directly implemented and operated by MCC. This came out of an assumption that God's Mission is already at work in the world and we seek to accompany and learn from those who are already part of that mission (churches, church agencies, local NGOs and civil society groups). We bring our resources together with their resources, their knowledge and personnel, walking together with a focus on relief, sustainable community development, justice, and peace-building. Partnering through local groups assumes that there is intrinsically a deeper knowledge, wisdom, and understanding from local personnel on their own needs and solutions than what outsiders bring to the conversation.

Through this local partnership approach, we have seen increased capacity of partners to respond to their own needs directly and a higher level of local ownership of the work, resulting in longer-term sustainability.

In the Chocó region of Colombia, Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches partner with MCC to provide household goods, food, and clothing in response to flooding. These churches increase trust in the community where many have been victims of violence from their neighbors. Through Fagroles, the church's registered nonprofit, they increase food security with urban gardens and rural farming projects, helping families overcome malnutrition. Once, a heavily armed paramilitary group pressured the Mennonite Brethren churches to pay them a "war contribution" from their rice processing plant. Pastor José Rutilio Rivas responded firmly, "Mennonite churches have been committed to nonviolence and peace-building for centuries. We will not support any armed groups, not even the State Armed Forces. If you force us, we will close this community development project, but we will not support you, even if it costs us our lives." Surprised by this boldness and aware that Mennonites in Colombia have held this position throughout time, the paramilitary commander promised to respect this position, and the community development work has been allowed to continue. Nelly Mosquera, a local MB pastor and theologian, said, "Our work is not only to preach the Gospel, but also to show compassion to the community as servants of God."

Anabaptist churches in the Global South, or in urban centers of poverty in the United States, with poverty visible in their midst, seem to take seriously James 2:16 (NIV), "If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" The need to partner with our Global church counterparts with a gospel that integrates word and deed, will only continue to increase in coming years.

ARTICLES ON GLOBAL MISSION PARTNERSHIP

Where Are Our Nightmares?

ANNE THIESSEN¹

At the very beginning of the expansion of the New Testament church into the Gentile world, Peter undergoes an experience that prepares him to make the cultural (and theological) jumps necessary for the expansion (Acts 10:9–16). His experience is normally referred to as a “vision.” But I have come to realize that it must have been a nightmare for him. The story bears this out, since the awfulness of the nightmare emboldens Peter to exclaim “NO!” three times to God.

Peter is not alone in his resistance to act graciously toward other cultures. We all tend to show less grace toward other cultures, especially those perceived as holding less power. This human tendency hinders healthy partnerships.

At the global summit of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) in 2016, which focused on churches partnering in mission and prayer, two keynote speakers called upon the denomination to renounce white privilege. An audible wave of shock, and then affirmation, swept the assembly. The group recognized that the gathering itself illustrated white privilege to some degree: the seven key speakers were white males, had ethnic Mennonite last names, and held graduate degrees, mostly doctorates. Missing from the roster were women, non-whites, and oral learners without formal education, to name a few—voices from the margins.

The call was, and remains, timely. Today, when some Christians claim prosperity as a mark of God’s blessing, this call reminds us of a dark side of prosperity and the power it offers. It reminds us that the power of privilege that prosperity bestows can hinder both fellowship and partnership.

As Anabaptists have recognized, the call includes simple living, generous sharing, and openhanded hospitality. The New Testament ideal was a community where “there were no needy people among them.”² But there’s more to the

1 Anne Thiessen and her husband, Robert, work under MB Mission to apprentice and mentor missionaries, helping them set up obedience-oriented, just-in-time training for local leaders of healthy, indigenous churches. They focus chiefly on reaching the indigenous communities of southern Mexico.

2 Acts 4:34 (NLT) is quoting Deuteronomy 15:4, showing that in the new Covenant community, God finally fulfills his promises in the old Covenant. [“to the old” sounds a little unfinished here. The old what?] See Santos Yao, “Dismantling Social Barriers through Table Fellowship” *Mission to Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 29–36. [Double-check this 2006 publication date. I can only find 2004 and 2007.]

call than an equitable distribution of wealth. Harder to see than the effects of disparity of wealth in our relationships with those of the Global South are the effects of white privilege (let the term stand for all sorts of human privilege) on congregations and leaders at the margins. Because of our white privilege, we have instituted traditions in the church that go beyond apostolic practice and hinder global partnerships. Our blindness to the equivalents of our own education and skill sets that other cultures offer keeps us from empowering people in those cultures. As a white woman without a seminary degree who has worked with the marginalized of Latin America, I find myself sometimes excluded from the work of the Church because I am a woman and sometimes included because I am a white missionary. I know what it is to hold privilege and what it is to be left out.

Anabaptists should easily recognize such a scenario where one group has the power to place its expectations on another. They were once a despised minority who refused to rely on traditional credentials for their leaders and also refused the official definition of *church* because it did not follow Christ's mandate of discipleship. In fact, in choosing adult baptism as the entry point into church, Anabaptists challenged not only the fundamental doctrine of the traditional church but also the very fabric of society, because infant baptism was how the state registered the young as new citizens.³ Anabaptists were once willing to die for their freedom to reject such traditions that undermined their obedience to Christ.

Today, the circumstances are reversed. Anabaptists have prospered in many places around the world and have had the power and resources to introduce their own customs and traditions into new cultures where they have brought the gospel. Despite good intentions, some of these traditions have been a poor fit, especially among the marginalized. This makes ICOMB's call to renounce white privilege timely and prophetic, because after decades of colonialism and triumphalism, Mennonite Brethren leaders are determined, along with many of their evangelical brethren, to lay aside power and contextualize the gospel critically.⁴

3 Alfred Neufeld, "Anabaptist Theologies of Mission: An Overview," *The Church in Mission: Perspectives of Global Mennonite Brethren on Mission in the 21st Century*, ed. Victor Wiens (Abbotsford, BC: MBMission, 2015), 92. Neufeld is drawing from Goertz, *Bruchstücke radikaler Theologie heute. Eine Rechenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2010).

4 The Lausanne Congress insisted on contextualization, echoing many mission writers including Roland Allen, Paul Hiebert, Jacob Loewen, Wilbert Shenk, Hans Kasdorf, and others. See Lausanne Movement, "The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action," <http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ct-commitment>, accessed February 1, 2018. In "Critical Contextualization," Paul Hiebert calls us to look critically at our own traditions as well as those of new cultures in the

For this reason, they now use the term *partnership* to describe organizations and institutions where they hope allies of unequal power, of different cultures and values, can work together as equals. Institutions are easy to spot, but any cooperation between disparate groups is a partnership, even if it is not formalized: when the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 sent letters out to Gentile churches in the provinces, the Jerusalem church (perceived as the seat of apostolic leadership and power) was setting guidelines for how Jews were to work alongside Gentiles, illustrating an organic partnership. The book of Acts illustrates how the partnership provided mentors for the younger Gentile churches (Barnabas in Antioch) and funding for social programs (the Gentile churches' collection for Jerusalem's famine relief). When Jacob Loewen spent his summers helping the Embera translate the Bible, theirs was a partnership between a highly literate academic and people from an oral culture. When immigrants start churches among Americans, these are partnerships between people from different cultural backgrounds. Anyone who plants churches or disciples or aids cross-culturally is forming relationships—partnerships—that reflect collaboration between people with different skill sets and resources. The institutions that result are their symbols and embodiment.

While human partnerships tend to favor the stronger partner, God initiated a different sort of partnership. We should remember that God invented partnership when he created humans. The Bible tells the story of true partnering, and we notice (1) how God hides or relinquishes power as he stoops to work with and through us, and (2) that the ultimate partnership is organic—a marriage of Christ and his church, expressed through a myriad of cultures. Jesus shines where we often fail.

In contrast, in human partnerships, those with greater privilege tend to introduce structures that work best for them. They build Bible schools and youth camps. They run organizations. They write constitutions, set up church discipline, and establish ordination requirements. Westerners have been doing this in the rest of the world for centuries, and much goodness has come from it.

But recently, we realized that these structures so familiar to us may sometimes be burdens for our partners, especially in partnerships related to church planting. For example, in southern Mexico, ordination requiring formal training creates leadership bottlenecks in oral cultures. Few communities can afford a brick-and-mortar Bible school, and even if they could, this form of training is largely unreproducible to the degree that it ignores how local leaders are appointed and trained. Constitutions brought in from the outside often inhibit native churches from serving the sacraments because of a lack of leaders qualified by partnering organizations. It was in partnership that American

light of Scripture. We learn together to submit all traditions to Christ. Hiebert, "Critical contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 12 (1984): 287–96.

missionaries first introduced these practices here, but their structures (whether institutional or not) reflected white privilege in the expectations they laid on their non-white partners. In other words, they used their status as missionaries to establish practice or tradition *before* engaging the non-white partners in a two-way conversation about how to lovingly obey Jesus in their own context.

I find evidence for such privilege at work in the requirements that denominations in Mexico tend to place on groups before they can be considered “churches.” These requirements often include formal credentials for ordination. Other requirements might include (1) must have twenty-five or more baptized members, (2) must own a church building, (3) must have a salaried pastor, (4) must be registered with the government. Unfortunately, not one of these requirements reflects the New Testament story.

A Hermeneutic of Obedience

How do we start a conversation around this? How do we, as partners, evaluate our practices and traditions to see which of them have reflected white privilege and hampered the development of healthy indigenous churches? I propose a criterion from the early Anabaptist movement: their hermeneutic of obedience.⁵ A hermeneutic of obedience focuses the church’s attention, within all its partnerships, on obedience to Christ rather than on formal mastery of doctrine or theology. In other words, church is defined simply as a group of people that gathers to love and obey Jesus in the power of the Spirit. Leaders are those anointed by God and accepted by the group to lead, whatever their education. To lay an outsider’s standard of education on church leaders in new or marginalized areas and then define church by whether a group has such leaders is the voice of privilege.

The study of theology will come. Self-theologizing will happen. But these are the *fruit* of obedience, not the cause. Western humanism has tempted us to mistake the order of these two, and the result is the stifling of new churches. To claim that “the lack of theological education has always meant a reduction for advancing missions”⁶—if this implies a lack of Western formal theological education—is to deny the story of the early church, of early Anabaptism, and of the power of Jesus’s words: “Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own” (Jn 7:17, NLT). Obedience comes first, as the first Anabaptists taught. When we make the

⁵ See Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2010), 63.

⁶ Victor Walls and Victor Wiens, “Mennonite Brethren Mission to Latin America,” in *The Church in Mission: Perspectives of Global Mennonite Brethren on Mission in the 21st Century*, ed. Victor Wiens (Abbotsford, BC: MBMission, 2015), 250.

knowledge of theology our standard rather than its expression through *loving obedience*, we grant privilege to those with greater access to knowledge (of one particular kind). Honoring wisdom over knowledge levels the playing field.

Jesus left no written scripture, no code of law, no structure for administration, no order of service. His “all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20, ESV) in the Great Commission is sparse, a body of general mandates in the gospels with very little detail to them. There are some forty or so commands embedded in the “all.” They can be compressed into seven, if need be, especially for new disciples just learning to follow Jesus, and old disciples, like us, who have taken detours:

- repent and believe;
- be baptized into the life of the Spirit;
- love everyone, including our enemies;
- give freely, remembering the blessedness of the poor;
- pray constantly, and be nourished by all of God’s Word;
- gather around the Lord’s Table to remember him;
- make obedient disciples.⁷

All subsequent teachings in the New Testament are inspired by these seven foundational commands of Christ (just as the Old Testament points forward to them and illustrates them), thus deriving their authority from the “all” that Christ left us. He is our supreme authority, his “all” our clarion call to action. *This—the Great Commission*—was the hermeneutic of obedience that early Anabaptists followed and that led them to break so drastically from the traditions of the official church. Alfred Neufeld insists that this mandate “is the most quoted and most radically lived and obeyed portion of Scripture” among the original Anabaptists.⁸ Today, it remains the foundation of our ministry.

I know that any of us would be appalled at an accusation that our actions have hampered obedience to Christ among our brothers and sisters in other cultures. As I said before, this reality is hard to see, because it happens often out of sight, at the margins.

In rural Peru, I worshipped in an Anabaptist church whose leader didn’t know if he had the authority to baptize or serve the Lord’s Supper. He didn’t know whether he was a “real pastor,” because he lacked “real credentials.” His congregation, lacking the requisite number of members, may not even have qualified as a church according to the group’s constitution, which was written and established by a white missionary within a few years of arriving in the country. The group there was uncertain as to what qualified as “real church.”

⁷ George Patterson and Richard Scoggins, *Church Multiplication Guide: The Miracle of Church Reproduction* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2002), 22.

⁸ Neufeld, “Anabaptist Theologies of Mission,” 86. Neufeld calls this the hermeneutic of obedience.

I did not sense they felt much freedom to challenge traditions imposed by others that inhibited the reproduction of churches and new leaders for these churches. I did not see an Anabaptist determination to practice the priesthood of all believers by extending the sacraments of the church to all congregations, regardless of whether its leaders held formal credentials.

As a movement, we lose something when the churches at the margins do not grasp this fundamental Anabaptist freedom. It signals that we have given our own (recent) traditions and requirements for training and leadership more importance than the Great Commission of Christ and the practical guidelines of Paul in Titus and 1 Timothy. It hinders the marginalized from simply obeying Jesus. It hinders them from discipling others into new, healthy congregations with indigenous leadership. What do we do about the marginalized “least of these”?

Down the street from where I used to live in a town of southern Mexico, a Me’phaa Indian came to Jesus. I would hear him singing gospel choruses when I passed his house. He had a radiant smile and greeted me joyously as “sister” whenever he saw me. He started gathering friends and family in his home to share the gospel in Me’phaa with them. The group grew. I believe that God intended this to be a Me’phaa church, the first of its kind in that town. But this brother was part of another church in town, and when the pastor in that church found out about the group, he insisted that only he, an ordained pastor, could lead it. The pastor was not Me’phaa. The meetings switched into Spanish and, after a time, died out. I hardly blame the pastor. He was dutifully following a model of leadership he had inherited. The model came from much further back, from some far away, unwitting center of “white privilege” or its Mexican equivalent.

Throughout Latin America, I have witnessed various traditions, whether introduced or local, inhibiting not only the practice of the sacraments but also prayer, forgiveness of enemies, and making disciples. In every case, these traditions, coming from some center of privilege, held more sway at the margins than the commands of Christ himself. They hindered these “margins” from becoming new “Antiochs” from where the Kingdom expands when the “Jerusalems” wane.⁹

How do we break the hold of white privilege at the margins of our movements so that congregations and their leaders have full confidence to be the

⁹ Andrew Walls argues that the Jerusalem Jews little understood that the gospel had already made what Ralph Winter calls a lateral shift away from Jerusalem to Antioch, from where the Kingdom would expand throughout the Gentile world even after Jerusalem fell (Walls, “Demographics, Power and the Gospel in the 21st Century,” *International Development from an Integrative Perspective*, ed. James Butare-Kiyovu [Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2011], 80–81).

church, reproducing new congregations and new leadership and practicing the sacraments? To bring marginalized congregations into a more complete fellowship, a more biblical organic partnership, I propose we revisit *with our partners* how we, as Anabaptists, prioritize our sources of authority in the church.

There are various sources of authority in the church, each lower one serving the higher. We get into trouble when our lowest level of authority—our cultural norms and traditions—gets passed on to other cultures and there usurps our highest authority, the commands of Christ as we find them in the gospels. In other words, we get into trouble when we bypass a hermeneutic of obedience and its radical commitment to the Great Commission.

The book of Acts narrates how the early church maintained this radical commitment. We should remember that the traditions of the devout Jews of that time were, at least in part, established by God! Torah was God's Law, and devout Jews believed that adherence to Torah would usher in the Kingdom. God had to torment Peter with a recurrent nightmare before he let go of his purity laws, and even then, later, under pressure from Judaizers, he went back to them and marginalized his Gentile brethren, refusing to eat with them. Even Barnabas, a missionary to the Gentiles, fell into this error.¹⁰

Moving into new cultures is painful, and not just for new, persecuted believers; it's painful for *us*! Where are our nightmares? Where are those sheets filled with impure animals? Where's the pain . . . for *us*? Might our "sheet" hold traditions that keep believers in other cultures from simply obeying Jesus in such things as the sacraments? Who are our Stephens challenging "Temple" worship? Might our Temple worship ignore gifted leaders who don't have traditional credentials? Where are those who insist on the priesthood of believers for those left out of current church structures—our present-day "re-baptizing" martyrs?¹¹

As Anabaptists, we honor those who rightfully challenged official tradition in the past. We are not called radicals for nothing. The hermeneutic of obedience is our heritage, as the 2016 ICOMB call proves. We should heed this call to simply obey Jesus, to place his teachings and mandates above our cherished traditions.

Before I came to work among Mixtec Indians in southern Mexico, I was part of a Honduran church-planting movement with Anabaptist values. The movement was explosive, birthing new churches all around me that were free

¹⁰ Gal 2:11–14.

¹¹ Vincent Donovan, describing missionary work among young people in America, said: "Do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before" (Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993], vii).

to reproduce because they did not define church or leadership in the traditional way. Every new church opened with biblically chosen leaders who baptized and served Communion, and trained others to do so—through mentored discipleship, in their homes, through their own network of extension work.

But into this scenario of multiplying rural churches came ordained pastors from Tegucigalpa, the capital, who told the rural pastors that these were not real churches and that their leaders were not true pastors because the leaders did not hold degrees and they were not properly ordained. The leadership of the movement was in crisis, its confidence shaken over the issue of authority. Who decides when a gathering is a church? Who appoints leaders? Early Anabaptists would have recognized this controversy. There are always “Judaizers.”

After prayer and biblical study, the leadership team—a partnership between one white missionary and a handful of local leaders—adopted a hermeneutical tool that would give a “Jerusalem Council blessing” to the rural churches in crisis. It was an Anabaptist “hermeneutic of obedience,” insisting that Jesus held absolute authority above all others. It held that Jesus had given the church its supreme mandates in his teachings and Commission, which could be summarized in the seven acts of obedience mentioned above.

With this simple tool, the Honduran pastors could know what the “all” of the Great Commission actually was. Focused on the authority of Jesus himself, they could know that they were churches because they had gathered in Jesus’s name to joyously obey his “all that I have commanded.” They could know that their leaders were true leaders because they were shepherding the flock, leading it into loving obedience to their true authority.

Outsiders’ definitions of “church” and “pastor” held less weight. I witnessed the nonformally trained local leaders gently repulsing the “Judaizers”—who tried to undermine their authority—naming Christ’s authority as their defense. It was an unforgettable example of the hermeneutic of community empowering the marginalized so they could become true partners. And it was this community that taught us the term “church multiplication.”¹²

I believe we have much to learn from such as these who may not appear “wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy,” to quote Paul (1 Cor 1:26, NLT). If we step out of their way and encourage them to create new ways to simply obey Jesus—by discipling new leaders within an oral context, for example, or removing institutional barriers for church planting—we may see churches multiply in a way unimaginable to us now. We may see God use new culturally relevant methods in unexpectedly powerful ways. I have witnessed this happen. The Hondurans taught me how God chooses “things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful” (1 Cor 1:27, NLT).

12 See Patterson’s *Church Multiplication Guide*.

A hermeneutic of obedience helps level the playing field of power. Under Christ's rule, privilege fades in the light of mutual submission. All partners are accountable to one another as they place obedience to the teachings and mandates of Christ above any cultural practices or religious traditions.¹³

Recently, in the name of my mission agency, I gave this message to some Latin American pastors in a partner conference: "We repent of the ways that we have hindered your simple obedience to Christ. We recognize that we introduced our traditions, especially those defining church and leadership, with too great an authority, and so they kept you from sacrament as well as from spontaneous reproduction. But we release you now from any Western traditions—such as education or governance styles—that have hindered your growth. We give you freedom to obey Jesus in the way that works best in your context. We commit ourselves as partners to remain your best cheerleaders, your best prayer warriors, your best sounding board, even your best critics, anticipating with joy what God will do through you as you simply obey Jesus."

I do not know what this group of leaders will choose to change in the future. Some of them are already changing the ways they define church and reproduce leadership. But some may think it is too late or too emotionally costly to make changes to familiar structures, unwieldy as they may be. Or they may wait for the leaders of the mission agency to initiate change. Or they may feel a loyalty to the missionaries that introduced these structures.¹⁴ This is an open-ended journey that we—I, my agency, and the Latin American leaders who are our partners—share. But a legitimate conversation about power between disparate partners has begun, based on our mutual accountability to obey Jesus.

Suggestions for Applying a Hermeneutic of Obedience to Church Partnerships

- Check, in partnership, that all new churches and members are empowered to obey Jesus's "all that I have commanded," including the sacraments. Identifying the seven commands of Christ for new believers and

13 MBMission recently restructured its partnership with global partners to better reflect mutual submission. Also see Christianity Today International, CT Pastors (website), "What Christians in the US Can Learn from Immigrant Pastors," January, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2018/january-web-exclusives/what-christians-in-us-can-learn-from-immigrant-pastors.html> for examples of how Global South partners call US Christians to obedience to Christ.

14 Justo Gonzalez describes the debt of loyalty many Latin American Protestants feel toward North America, making Hispanic or indigenous contextualization more difficult (González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990]).

churches helps them focus first on his authority.¹⁵

- Revisit, in partnership, constitutions introduced by outsiders to assure an emphasis on loving obedience to Christ over Western knowledge and tradition.
- Revisit, in partnership, requirements for defining new churches and appointing new leaders in ways that falsely raise the bar above biblical requirements (those in Titus and 1 Timothy, for example).
- Check for leadership bottlenecks. Adapt pastoral training, using critical contextualization, so that theological knowledge is not a prerequisite for leadership in new churches. Adopt ways to train anointed leaders already serving, mobilizing them as obedient disciples and effective trainers in their own context, promoting self-theologizing and the unhindered reproduction of *their* leadership.¹⁶ Recognize that the lack of “properly trained leaders” is a sign of *our* failure. There is no biblical basis for blaming this on a group’s lack of resources or gifting.
- Create ways, in our summits, to listen to those who lead others into simple, loving obedience to Jesus, without reference to credentials associated with privilege. One avenue for this is to use oral storytelling as a medium for speakers.

Peter, despite his initial resistance to God’s direction for him to form healthy partnerships with the Gentiles, and despite his subsequent failures to empower them, clearly was able to move ahead with powerful results. He became a champion of God’s work among the Gentiles, second only to Paul. I sometimes wonder if Peter’s long journey from Joppa to Caesarea, along dusty byways and accompanied by three pagans, was meant to give him time to reflect on the full meaning of his nightmare. I assume he processed it with his companions. May all who engage in global partnerships, especially with the marginalized, ask God to send us our own version of Peter’s nightmare. And a journey of reflection and two-way conversations before acting.

15 In Mexico, the Assemblies of God Church recognizes four levels of credentialing, the lowest of which ordains pastors without any formal training. They are encouraged to practice the sacraments.

16 The MB extension program Priscilla & Aquila in Paraguay provides continuing education for serving pastors. Also, for ways to adapt pastoral training contextually see Tom A. Steffen, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers* (LaHabra, CA: Center for Organizational Ministry and Development, 1997); Sherwood Lingenfelter and Paul Gupta, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision: Training Leaders for a Church-Planting Movement; A Case from India* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 2006); and *Diversified Theological Education: Equipping All God’s People*, ed. F. Ross Kinsler (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2011).

Six Decades in the Making

A Story of Friendship and Ministry Partnership between African-Initiated Churches and North American Mennonites

JAMES R. KRABILL¹

In 2019, Mennonites and African-initiated churches (AIC) will celebrate sixty years of building relationships and cultivating partnerships with each other for ministry. The story begins in the late 1950s when Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) received a letter of invitation to visit a group of African independent, unaffiliated congregations in eastern Nigeria who had heard *The Mennonite Hour*—an MBM internationally transmitted radio broadcast—and were interested in learning more about Mennonites.

MBM workers Ed and Irene Weaver were appointed in 1959 to begin a ministry with these churches and soon discovered scores of other similar churches scattered throughout Nigeria and all along the coast of West Africa in Dahomey (now Benin), Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

For six decades now, Mennonites have nurtured relationships with, and explored ways to walk alongside, these and other independent African-initiated movements in their faith journey between the ancient traditions of their ancestors and the newer claims of Christ on their lives. The story of these relationships is a most fascinating pilgrimage in partnership, lined with potential land mines and pitfalls, but in the end largely fruitful and mutually rewarding to the many and varied parties involved.

To mark this important milestone, I have joined Jonathan Larson² and Thomas Oduro³ in soliciting and assembling the reflections of two dozen AIC colleagues and over thirty North American Mennonite workers concerning the significance and impact of these long-standing relationships. It is our hope

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² Former Mennonite worker with AICs in Botswana.

³ Long-time AIC-affiliated church member and current president of Ghana's Good News Theological College and Seminary serving AIC leaders in West Africa.

that these reflections—along with several additional contributions from various outside observers of African church life in fields of missiology, church history, education, women’s studies, and worship trends—can be published during this celebrative period and made available to persons interested in global church developments.

The following pages represent a beginning sampler of the broader research we are undertaking. For starters, missiologist Wilbert Shenk will provide a historical overview of how Mennonite-AIC relationships took root and expanded in some ten sub-Saharan countries. Several illustrations will then be offered from both AIC and Mennonite perspectives describing how the relationships that emerged over the years were formative in shaping the faith and cultural understandings of the participants. In the last section, Jonathan Larson will relate a “generous insight” from an Afrikaaner scholar that captures well the humble attitude and patient posture required in such initiatives to watch a seed fall into the ground, die, then eventually grow and begin bearing fruit.

Historical highlights on the road to partnership

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In 1959 few people in Europe and North America had heard the term “separatist churches.” Anthropologists had studied the exotic Cargo cults in the South Pacific and the Peyote religion practiced among Native Americans. But mission scholars saw no reason to devote time to the study of nativistic, syncretistic, or other new religious movements reacting to Christianity. Such phenomena was generally not recognized as being of direct relevance to Christian missions. In this brief reflection, I will describe in broad strokes some important steps in the first phase of what was to become an initiative that continues to the present.

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Research Begins

In the 1920s the *International Review of Mission* carried two reports on these movements: “The Prophet Movement in the Congo”⁵ by P. H. J. Lerrigo on Kimbanguism, and from South Africa “The Separatist Church Movement”⁶ by C. T. Loram. In 1936 Karl Aldén reported on the continuing development of Kimbanguism⁷ and raised questions about how to relate to it. The next year, R. H. W. Shepherd surveyed “The Separatist Churches of South Africa.”⁸ He highlighted the continuing struggle to understand these movements. Twenty years later, J. W. C. Dougall reported on “African Separatist Churches” as a continent-wide phenomenon that called for careful consideration of these movements.⁹

Wherever these movements cropped up in Africa, they were almost sure to be either ignored or dismissed as exotic and unworthy of serious study. The full extent of these indigenous initiatives and their locations remained largely undocumented. Most missionaries and missiologists failed to appreciate their significance. Fortunately, other scholars—anthropologists, historians, and sociologists—had been researching these new religious phenomena in various parts of the world.¹⁰

Bengt Sundkler’s study *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, first published in 1948, was a major step forward. This book included a twenty-one-page appendix: “A List of Native Separatist Churches as on August 1, 1945,” naming 845 churches. Sundkler added a note reporting that in May 1947, after work on the book was completed, another list had been sent to him identifying an additional 123 churches that had not been incorporated in his original list. The *International Review of Missions* reviewed this book.¹¹ But its pathbreaking significance became apparent with the publication of the revised edition in 1961.

5 *International Review of Mission* 11 (1922): 270–77.

6 *International Review of Mission* 15 (1926): 476–82. About the same time, an inquiry was conducted by the Union Government’s Native Churches Enquiry Commission in 1925, and its findings were reported in Allen Lea, *The Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta, 1927).

7 *International Review of Mission* 25 (1936): 347–53.

8 *International Review of Mission* 26:4 (1937): 453–63.

9 *International Review of Mission* 45:3 (1956): 257–66.

10 See Gottfried Oosterwal, *Modern Messianic Movements* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1973), 49–55, which includes extensive notes and references to scholarly writings available by 1970. Most of this scholarship was produced after 1950, primarily by anthropologists and sociologists.

11 See *International Review of Mission* 58, no. 2 (1949): 230–33. Strangely, Efraim Andersson’s *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1958) went unreviewed. But see Harold W. Fehderau, “Review of *Messianic*

In that version, Sundkler added a substantial new chapter—“Developments, 1945–60”—indicating his own change of stance toward these movements: they were Christ-ward movements, he said, not bridges back to pre-Christian religion.¹²

Starting Over

When Mennonite missionaries Edwin and Irene Weaver disembarked at Lagos, Nigeria, in November 1959, they had never heard of “independency,”¹³ as it was then called. Neither did they know their new assignment would put them in one of the “hot spots” of religious innovation in Africa; i.e., southeastern Nigeria. Their sponsoring mission agency was equally unaware of these circumstances.¹⁴ But it would quickly become clear to the Weavers that their twenty years of service in India had not prepared them for what they were encountering in Nigeria.¹⁵

The conflicting messages the Weavers got as they attempted to become acquainted with mission and church leaders in the region intensified their confusion. The missionaries and local leaders of the mission-established churches whom they consulted refused to relate to these “independent” groups. Indeed, relations were fraught with conflict and ill will. Missionaries working in southeastern Nigeria spoke with one voice: “You are not needed here. Find another place to work!” By contrast, the “independent” churches were clamoring for assistance. This was as puzzling as it was discouraging.

After several months of struggle, the Weavers realized they had to “die” to the patterns, methods, and knowledge they had depended on in their previous

Popular Movements in the Lower Congo,” in *Practical Anthropology* 7, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1960): 279–83.

12 The 1961 edition also included a “Special Bibliography” of forty-four items, primarily articles, published between 1902 and 1961 about these movements. Again, Andersson’s book, n7, is not mentioned.

13 Terminology has evolved. “Separatist” could be construed as a pejorative term, implying these churches had broken away from the mission-founded churches, but this was not true for many of these churches. In the 1960s, these movements were referred to as “African Independent Churches” (AIC). Soon some writers began to use “African Indigenous Churches” (AIC). Since the 1990s, the term “African Initiated Churches” (AIC) has gained acceptance.

14 Sketched briefly in my essay, “Go Slow through Uyo,” in *Fullness of Life for All*, eds. I. Daneel, C. Van Engen, and H. Vroom (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2008), 329–40.

15 See Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1970), which gives an account of the Weavers’ experience in finding their way in this new situation.

missionary work. The conventional methods and patterns would only reinforce the status quo and must be resolutely abandoned. Yet it was becoming clear that the situation in which the Weavers were commissioned to work in southeastern Nigeria was a God-given assignment. Lacking a blueprint to follow, they would have to depend on the Spirit to disclose new paths of ministry.

Confirmation of this new approach came when the Weavers providentially encountered Harold W. Turner at a guesthouse in Lagos in 1961. They quickly discovered their mutual interest in these new African religious movements. Turner, a lecturer in Old Testament at Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, first encountered this phenomenon on Lumley Beach, Sierra Leone, in 1957. His intrigue with what he observed led to a major research project that focused on one of these groups, the Church of the Lord (Aladura). He was now four years into this study, which would be published in two volumes as *African Independent Church* (1967).

Other initiatives were also under way. The Study Department of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism convened a consultation at Mindolo, Zambia, in 1962. Harold Turner and Edwin Weaver were invited to participate.¹⁶ About the same time, a continent-wide research project was being launched by Anglican missionary researcher David B. Barrett, based in Nairobi, Kenya. The results of his macro-study were published in 1968, entitled *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*.¹⁷ The trigger for this large-scale study was the secession of sixteen thousand members from the Western Kenya Diocese of the Anglican Church in 1957.¹⁸

A Strategy Emerges

The Weavers brought a particular gift to this ministry; they were passionate about relating to AICs at the grassroots and devoted their energies to improvising training programs for newly literate leaders who wanted to study the Bible. At the same time, they worked to build bridges of understanding and relationship between the older churches and the AICs. Much of the "bad blood" between the various church groups stemmed from mutual ignorance. All were guilty of spreading negative and misleading information about other

¹⁶ Weaver was unable to attend but Turner made a substantial contribution based on his extensive research and theoretical and methodological innovations in the study of these phenomena. See conference report published as *African Independent Church Movements*, ed. Victor E. W. Hayward (London: WCC Department of Missionary Studies, 1963).

¹⁷ David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968).

¹⁸ Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, Preface, xvii.

groups. Bringing people together to *listen* to the other was a necessary first step in fostering constructive relations.

During the period 1963 to 1965, relations began to improve as a result of regular meetings of the Inter-Church Study Group, comprised of leaders of the full spectrum of churches. Here people learned to know one another, nurturing respect and friendship.

In addition, an extensive survey of churches in southeastern Nigeria was conducted in order to learn to know the churches and leaders. A Bible school for leaders with only basic education was established, and scholarships were awarded to individuals with adequate academic background to do theological study at higher levels. But the Nigerian Civil War, 1966–1969, disrupted the work the Weavers had started in Nigeria, and all foreign workers were forced to leave the country.

Nevertheless, Mennonite engagement in Nigeria had one more phase. Harold Turner had listened for several years to the leader of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) dream about establishing a seminary where leaders might be trained. What was lacking was qualified faculty. Turner urged Mennonites to respond to this opportunity. In 1970, B. Charles and Grace Hostetter began a six-year stint assisting the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in establishing its seminary in Lagos, Nigeria. The Theological Education Fund provided financial support for operating costs.

Seed Sown in Central Africa

The largest African-initiated church on the African continent is the fruit of the ministry of Simon Kimbangu. Kimbangu was refused ordination by the Baptist Mission because of his lack of education. Nonetheless, convinced he was called of God to preach and heal, he began his public ministry in 1921. Between March and September of that year, Kimbangu made enormous impact through his ministry of preaching, healing, and deliverance. In September, the Belgian Colonial Government arrested and imprisoned Kimbangu on grounds of inciting civil unrest. He was held in prison until his death in 1951. It served the purposes of the colonial authorities to keep the focus on Kimbangu and The Church of Jesus Christ through Simon Kimbangu as a threat to public order into the 1950s.

Efraim Andersson's *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (1958) helped mitigate this hostility through careful scholarly analysis of these movements, of which Kimbanguism was only one. Harold Fehderau, Mennonite Brethren Bible translator in the Congo, not only wrote an appreciative review

of Andersson's study¹⁹ but also later published several articles on Kimbangu and his ministry.²⁰

During the academic year 1962 to 1963, James E. Bertsche, Mennonite missionary with the Congo Inland Mission, wrote a 355-page master's thesis in anthropology at the Graduate School of Northwestern University, entitled, "Kimbanguism: A Separatist Movement." The tenor of Bertsche's conclusion was respectful, insightful, and empathetic. He concluded:

There is in the history and nature of this offspring of the encounter between Christian missions and Bakongo culture much food for thought for the missionary and not a few lessons that he would do well to learn. In view of the fact that the movement has from its earliest days grown and flourished precisely in areas which have been evangelized by both Catholic and Protestant missions, there is the clear implication that while the Bakongo have found the Christian faith, as such, to be meaningful, there has been a failure on the part of Christian missions to effectively penetrate and appreciate the cultural and religious needs of their people and a failure to significantly adapt the Christian message to these same needs. It seems obvious that the Kimbanguist Church today is attempting to do what Christian missions have not done; i.e., to interpret and adapt the Christian faith to the cultural needs and realities of the Congolese people.²¹

Subsequently, in the substantial article "Kimbanguism: A Challenge to Missionary Statesmanship"²² Bertsche presented the missiological implications of his anthropological study. His sympathies were clearly with the Africans who had struggled to achieve a *contextually appropriate* understanding of the gospel and thus overcome the inadequacies of what the missionaries, in spite of their sincere efforts, had offered.

The efforts of Fehderau and Bertsche did not, however, immediately translate into positive interest on the part of Congolese Mennonites in relating to AICs. Over time, attitudes changed. The process by which Kimbanguists and

19 Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements*, n7.

20 "Concerning a Culturally Relevant Witness in Congo," *Practical Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (Mar.–Apr. 1961): 71–76; "Enthusiastic Christianity in an African Church, *Ibid.*," 8, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1961): 279–80, 282; "Kimbanguism: Prophetic Christianity in Congo," *Ibid.* 9, no. 4 (July–Aug. 1962): 156–78.

21 James E. Bertsche, "Kimbanguism: A Separatist Movement" (master's thesis, Graduate School of Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1963), 340.

22 *Practical Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1966): 13–33. We can only conjecture as to why Bertsche made no overt use of his thesis subsequently. Perhaps it was because Kimbanguism remained controversial in the eyes of most Protestants into the 1970s. His study clearly informed his later executive leadership of Congo Inland Mission/Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission.

Mennonites “discovered” each other started in Europe. In 1966 the director of the Belgian Fellowship of Reconciliation contacted David and Wilma Shank, who were then serving in Belgium, and asked them to host two Kimbanguist leaders who were returning to Congo from a meeting of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in Denmark. The Belgian Protestant Churches declined to receive these pacifist Kimbanguists whom they regarded as “sectarians.” The Shanks helped facilitate further Mennonite contacts that led to the placement of Mennonite Central Committee and Eirene—European service agency—volunteers in Kimbanguist schools and with the church’s experimental farm over a period of years. In 1971 Kuntima Diangienda, senior leader of the church, invited David Shank to attend the Golden Jubilee of the Kimbanguist Church, which drew four hundred thousand people to their holy city, Nkamba, Congo.²³

The Vision Spreads in West Africa

Unable to get a visa to enter Nigeria on their return to West Africa in 1969, Ed and Irene Weaver made Accra, Ghana, their base. For the next eight years, the Weavers played a “John the Baptist” role, sharing the vision and passion that had emerged during their short six years in Nigeria with colleagues, first in other West African and then southern Africa countries. Wherever they went, the Weavers planted the seed of a vision of what could happen when Christians of all stripes met together to study the scriptures, listen to one another’s history, and discuss distinctive convictions and theological vision. Everyone must approach the study of the scriptures as learners, they said, open to gaining insight as people share out of their particular experiences.

In West Africa, the Weavers made contact with AICs in Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Benin.²⁴ In each of these countries, programs emerged. No two programs were alike, but all found their focus in Bible study and training leaders. In Ghana and Benin, multiple AICs joined together in sponsoring and participating in organized Bible study. The Good News College and Seminary in Accra today is the outgrowth of the Good News Training Institute organized in 1970.²⁵ Ed Weaver met Harry Henry, Protestant leader from Benin, at the All-Africa Conference of Churches in Abidjan in 1969. Ed and Irene then visited Benin in early 1970. Bible-study seminars were held several times

23 David A. Shank, *Mission from the Margins* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 50–51.

24 These explorations and program developments up to 1974 are reported in Edwin and Irene Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1975).

25 From the beginning, various Protestant groups participated in staffing GNTI. The Lutherans provided staff for the institute on a continuing basis.

in the next several years. But a Marxist faction seized control of the country, and for nearly a decade no further contacts were feasible.

In 1983 David and Wilma Shank renewed contact with churches in Benin. The Inter-confessional Protestant Council proposed that a seminar for church leaders be held in December of that year. The success of this seminar resulted in an annual five-day seminar organized around themes selected by the IPCB.

Although the seminars continued as an annual event, the AICs increasingly felt the need for a pastoral training program. Eventually, Benin Bible Institute was established. Mennonite workers Dr. Daniel and Marianne Goldschmidt-Nussbaumer from France and Rod and Lynda Hollinger-Janzen from North America located in Benin. A medical program serving people without access to healthcare was developed, now known as Bethesda Hospital. Rod Hollinger-Janzen taught in the Bible Institute. Some Protestant churches supported this effort to provide theological education for AICs.²⁶ The theme running through all of these ministries in Benin was, and still is, *partnership*.²⁷

The initiative in Liberia was cut short by the civil war that started in 1989. Mennonite workers Peter and Betty Hamm and Steve and Dorothy Wiebe-Johnson withdrew as war broke out.

Although Ed Weaver made a preliminary investigation into Ivory Coast in 1969, he was limited by his lack of French. Marlin Miller, director of a Mennonite student center in Paris that served primarily Africans, met Ivoirian students from the Harrist Church who expressed interest in continuing relationship. Subsequently, he visited Ivory Coast several times to get acquainted with the Harrist leadership.

In 1972 Mennonite Board of Missions decided to respond to this opportunity. David and Wilma Shank and James and Jeanette Krabill invested several years in preparatory study in Aberdeen, Scotland, and Paris, France, before moving to Ivory Coast in 1978 in response to the call from the head of the Harrist Church, John Ahui, to “help me water the tree.”²⁸ The two couples worked in Bible teaching and leadership training with Harrists for over a decade and continue relationships with Harrist churches as of this writing, in Ivory Coast and Paris, France.

26 Rodney Hollinger-Janzen, “A Biblical Teaching Program by the Interconfessional Protestant Council of Benin with Mennonite Cooperation,” in ed. David A. Shank, *Ministry in Partnership with African Independent Churches* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions), 161–70.

27 Nancy Frey and Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network, 2015).

28 D. A. Shank, *Ibid.*, 55–82, summarizes these developments.

The Vision Moves South

In 1968 Mennonite program agencies agreed to explore possible opportunities in southern Africa. Veteran Mennonite mission workers in Africa—Donald Jacobs, East Africa, and James Bertsche, Congo—were appointed to lead this effort. Their exploratory trip took place in April 1970 during which they visited Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. With full awareness that apartheid had cast a pall over the entire region, the team recommended that Mennonite agencies find ways of serving there nonetheless: “We finish this investigation, analysis, and report with the clear conviction that we must begin to participate in life south of the Zambesi. May God give courage and wisdom . . . infinite patience, and compassion as we roll up our sleeves and take up the challenge for Jesus Christ and His kingdom.”²⁹

Specific action recommendations were few. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) had already placed teachers in Botswana in 1968. In 1971 Eastern Mennonite Missions sent a missionary couple and Mennonite Central Committee sent three teachers to Swaziland. Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) planned to send workers to Lesotho the following year. The question of placing workers in the Republic of South Africa proved perplexing. In view of a meeting planned for the following year, James Juhnke prepared a series of study papers. At the Maseru Consultation April 30–May 1, 1972, Juhnke urged Mennonite agencies to “grasp the nettle” and send people to South Africa.³⁰

There were also developments on other fronts. The AIMM executive secretary proposed to his board that “given the vigor of the Swaziland independent churches and the expressed desire of at least one Swazi church leader for a structured training program for independent church leadership in that country, we recommend that someone be invited to visit Swaziland to attempt to determine the receptivity of these leaders to dialogue.”³¹

Eventually, Edwin and Irene Weaver were enlisted to help work out a strategy for Mennonite agencies to work with AICs in southern Africa. Weavers were based in Gabarone, Botswana, from January 1975 to May 1977.³² But there was no grand strategic blueprint. The culture of each country was

29 Don Jacobs and James Bertsche, *Southern Africa Study* (N.p., n.d., 1970), Foreword.

30 James Juhnke prepared nine papers for the consultation, reproduced in Vern Preheim, ed., *A Collection of Writings by Mennonites on Southern Africa* (N.p., 1972), 1–53.

31 Jim Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace* (Elkhart, IN: AIMM, 1998), 446.

32 Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM*, 469–590, narrates this founding phase and subsequent development.

unique—shaped by its history, ethnic groups, languages, natural resources, economy, and political system.

Through experience, a cluster of guiding principles emerged that have shaped Mennonite response to AICs. These include:

- Mennonite agencies go only where they are invited into a working relationship with AICs.
- Having heard AIC leaders in west, central, and southern Africa call for assistance in equipping their people to understand the Bible more adequately, Mennonites regard their main contribution to be encouraging and enabling study of the scriptures.
- Mennonite workers will focus on equipping church leaders through training appropriate to the background of the leaders and the needs of their churches.
- Workers will facilitate constructive interchurch relations, both among AICs and between AICs and the traditional denominations.
- Mennonite agencies will avoid providing subsidies for capital projects or supporting operating budgets for churches or institutions.
- It is not the goal of Mennonite agencies to establish Mennonite churches alongside AICs. If such churches should emerge, it will be the result of local initiative, not the foreign agency.

Conclusion

The experiences Mennonites have had with African-initiated churches over the past sixty years can be summarized in a general observation: Wherever Mennonites have encountered AICs, they have been received with open hands and warm hearts. AICs have been eager to share out of their experiences and were ready to learn from others. They wanted to be treated with respect as fellow disciples of Jesus Christ. Journeying together has been a mutually enriching experience.

The Mennonite journey with AICs is a journey for which no map was available. Perhaps a better way of describing this experience is to see it as wanderings on uncharted paths. The reflections being compiled are rich in insight into what it means to engage in a multicultural ministry. There have been failures and disappointments but also successes and achievements. Looking back on what has been attempted one is filled with gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of this faith venture.

“Wanderings on Uncharted Paths”

A Few Testimonies on the Journey

The primary objective of this collection of reflections was not to present an exhaustive history of the initiative. Neither was it to recount every activity or project that was undertaken in every location where Mennonites and AICs partnered together. Rather, we were more interested in soliciting materials from both African and North American colleagues that could “cast light on the nature, texture, and significance of the experience.” It was in this way that we described the project to potential contributors, asking them to submit 500- to 700-word essays as “personal accounts of events, experiences, conversations or discoveries arising from the encounter between Mennonites and AICs.”

Many of the reflections in the collection tilt toward highlighting positive rather than negative or challenging features of the relationships that developed. In reality, fostering respectful partnerships across cultural divides is not easy work. The sixty years of relationship-building have seen their fair share of *faux pas*, of misunderstandings, missteps, and miscalculations. That is the nature and risk of venturing down uncharted paths with no clear roadmap to guide the journey.

Dr. Dana L. Robert³³ is one of the “outside observers” who has followed the Mennonite-AIC encounter over many years. She reminds us in her contribution to this volume of one of the unforeseen outcomes and unanswered questions arising from the partnership relationships described in this collection. She writes:

Even as the Mennonites avoided founding their own churches, Christianity was growing rapidly throughout the continent. In solidarity with their friends and partners, some African Christians wished to be called “Mennonites.” One of the questions raised by this splendid history of faithfulness is at what point does dying to self require giving up the “rights” even to one’s own name? What if one’s friends wish to call themselves Mennonites? And what if the meaning of “Mennonite” changes because it has been adopted by “others”? Perhaps the Mennonite-AIC relationship has changed not only the AICs, but the very definition of what it means to be a Mennonite.

Aware of these realities and many others, we offered contributors open-ended topics from which they could choose in reflecting on their intercultural

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encounters and experiences. Possible themes for their essays included the following:

- personal growth, healing, and transformation
- clearer vision of leadership, of service and its demands
- fresh insight into the Scriptures
- new understanding of tradition, culture, and history
- reworking of theology or spiritual priorities
- vivid awareness of the Holy Spirit’s power and work
- new ministry, worship practices, or customs
- deepened mission calling and discipleship
- discovery of new kinship
- challenges to received wisdom, values, or supposition

Several contributors have submitted two or more essays, so the total number has exceeded fifty to date. These are being arranged in chapters by themes using eight categories of agricultural activity: “tilling,” “sowing,” “germination,” “growth,” “pollination,” “weeding,” “watering,” and “harvesting.” An “Additional Resources” section will accompany the essays, featuring relevant books, articles, media productions, and a few unpublished manuscripts, for people desiring a fuller account of the AIC-Mennonite relationships that have developed over the years.

What follows here, then, is a small sampling of the essays submitted so far. Selections include both men and women, Africans and North Americans, with some attempt to offer geographical diversity in representation.

Testimony #1: “My training is for the purpose of training others”

ESTHER MANYEYO TAWIAH, GHANA

I grew up in the Ghanaian Presbyterian Church but loved the music in the African-initiated churches and would sneak away from the formal liturgy to attend their services. When my parents would find out about this, they were very upset and would beat me. But I was more attracted to AIC worship and eventually left the Presbyterian Church in the early 1970s and joined the Universal Prayer Fellowship.

I joined Good News Training College, now Good News Theological College and Seminary, as a copy typist in the late 1980s. I was a member of the World Evangelism Ministry from 1984 till February 2005. I joined the college from this church. This church at that time was a member of the PAG, Pentecostal Association of Ghana, later CAIC, Council for African Instituted Churches, Ghana. I am now a member of the Immanuel Believers Ministry.

When I went to my first Good News seminar I was fascinated by the way the teachers approached Bible and theology. This was about the same time that

two new teaching couples arrived at Good News: Ed and Lorraine Spruth from the Presbyterian Church and Phil and Julie Bender from the Mennonites.

I was asked by Good News to play a secretarial role at the school. This gave me an opportunity to listen in on some of the discussions, to take minutes, and to prepare handouts for the various professors. Occasionally I would read through the handouts and became more and more interested in what was being presented. When professors would ask me to make 20 copies for their class, I would make 21 and take the extra one home to read on my own. The next day in the office I would ask different professors questions about things I had read though they had no idea where I was coming up with all these questions! Eventually I was encouraged to take the three-year program myself, which I did.

I joined classes in 1989–1992 when the school was still meeting on the beach location. During this time I became very close to Phil and Julie Bender. Philip taught me Old Testament and Julie taught me Shepherding and Counseling. I learned a lot from sitting in their classes, and I have not regretted one bit for being their student. The Benders loved to work with the indigenous churches in Ghana. They honored most of the invitations from these churches such as harvest and thanksgiving services, funerals, and naming ceremonies. I was invited to go with the Benders to do interpretation from English to local languages when they were asked to teach or preach. I speak three Ghanaian languages fluently, and so one of my jobs anytime that there is joint service is to serve as an interpreter.

I was new in the faith and peppered the Benders with all kinds of questions. Some of the names and terms in the Bible are very strange, you know, and I had no idea what they meant. The Benders often invited me into their home for meals, and when they traveled to teaching assignments outside of Accra, they would ask me to house-sit their home. I did this at least a half dozen times. I was so impressed that they would entrust their place to me. That shows you how deep our relationship had become! There was a special bond between the couple and me such that I was able to go to them at any time for clarification if I did not understand what they taught. I enjoyed going out with them because I learned many things that I did not fully understand in the classroom.

Julie and I became like sisters. We sometimes went out shopping and did cooking together—Ghanaian dishes and American cookies. I spent so much time with the Benders. My passion for African indigenous women began in my association with Phil and Julie. I saw that the church I belonged to and other indigenous churches needed to study the Bible more seriously. Julie was often invited to teach church leaders as well as women. So, I have been very much involved with women in such studies for more than ten years. The purpose has been to train women to lead Bible studies in their own congregations.

After my job as a secretarial assistant at Good News and my graduation in 1992, I took a job as the school librarian. Then I was invited to further my

studies at Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya, 1993–1997. From there, I attended Bethel Seminary in Minneapolis, 1997–2000, and worked in the seminary library. I returned to Good News to teach, lead women’s Bible studies, and work in the library. We have a great collection of books at Good News, around 25,000 volumes, one of the best of any theological seminary in all of Ghana. My desire is to continue on and get my master’s in Library Science. The accrediting agency in Ghana is requiring it.

All I can do is to offer a very big thanks to Phil and Julie Bender and to the Mennonite churches who have assisted Good News College and Seminary in providing the training we need so that we as local leaders can also train others.

Testimony #2: “An offer of prayer”

JIM SHENK, SWAZILAND

It was a simple request that my young Swazi neighbor friend Amos conveyed to me in the wee hours of the morning as I struggled to stay awake in my first all-night church service. “Preacher Mambo is asking if it is OK for him to pray for your wife.”

We had arrived in Swaziland several months earlier. After formal language study in town and periodic visits to this rural community in the center of the country to help the community build our house, we had moved to Gilgal.

Our house was located next to the local Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion. As a follow-up to the Bible teaching ministry of Harold and Christine Wenger and an earlier contact with Ed and Irene Weaver, the Mennonite team in Swaziland had asked whether this church community would like a couple to live among them. The response was positive with suggestions for our involvement to include developing a water supply, a community garden, and a medical clinic.

A central part of our assignment was to develop a close relationship with this congregation. Our training and philosophical orientation encouraged us to fully immerse ourselves in the local culture and life of this community. So we were prepared to spend many a night in these all-night celebrations filled with preaching, testimonies, choirs, and prayers for healing.

Yet as I watched the dancing, singing, frenzied praying, and sometimes vigorous shaking and poking of persons being prayed for in the center of the congregation, I was not so sure I wanted to subject my wife to this. “Why does Preacher Mambo want to pray for my wife?” I whispered to Amos. Somewhat embarrassed, he replied, “Preacher Mambo thinks she is sick because she doesn’t have any children.”

I remembered one of the first questions our neighbors in Gilgal asked: “Where are your children?” When we said that we did not have children, they

assumed we had not heard them correctly and politely asked with whom we had left our children when we came to Africa. Married three years and no children! It was a concept that was difficult in a society where traditionally a man wanted to make sure a woman was fertile before investing in bride wealth.

It was now clear that the community assumed something was wrong with Donna. What should I say to Amos? The assumption that Donna was sick was so off base, I thought. If I said it was alright to pray for her, how would my wife feel? Agreeing would simply reinforce the local male-dominated patterns. There was no chance to check signals with Donna; she was seated with the women, and I with the men.

Rarely had I been so conflicted. I wanted to fit in, but this didn't seem right. My embarrassment was concealed by the dim light from two pressure paraffin lanterns hanging over our heads, but suddenly I felt quite sweaty under my white robe. I leaned into Amos and whispered in his ear that Donna was not sick. We simply were too busy to have children while in college and wanted to wait until we could be settled in Swaziland, I explained.

Amos nodded with understanding, but I sensed disappointment as he left to deliver my response to Preacher Mambo, who was seated on the platform. I have often wondered about that incident and what my response really said about me. Was I worried about the potential response from my wife or was this really about my need to be in control? Did I want the benefit of proving my manhood rather than giving God all the credit? Might our relationship with this congregation have been enhanced had Preacher Mambo prayed for Donna?

The community was indeed overjoyed when our daughter was born over a year later. Our Swazi mother and pastor's wife, Makeh Fakudze, not surprisingly named her *Lindiwe*—"the long-awaited one."

When Makeh Fakudze and the women of the church asked whether they could perform a traditional "coming-out" ceremony for Lindiwe, we did not know what it would entail, but without hesitation readily agreed!

Testimony #3: "A prophet in the land"

RACHEL HILTY FRIESEN, BOTSWANA

... They shall know that a prophet has been among them.

—Ezekiel 33:33

Memories of the Prophet Mokaleng, founder of the church, was what I was seeking during a year-and-a-half of questioning, listening, recording, as I prepared to write the history of the Spiritual Healing Church in Botswana.

Members of the church who had witnessed the prophet's healing ministry in the 1950s were still around, but they were aging and memories were on the

verge of being lost. And so I traveled around the country, seeking the persons whose stories could fill in the gaps in the emerging picture of a great prophet, Jacob "Mokaleng" Motswaosele.

Five times I traveled to the simple home of Benjamin Moilwa, manager of a construction company in the capital city of Gaborone, and *moruti* (minister, teacher) in the Spiritual Healing Church. Like those of so many others whom I had interviewed, his stories were, frankly, incredible. The matter-of-fact tone of his voice contrasted sharply with the amazing events he was recounting. What was I to make of all this? On one visit, he told me:

I went to Matsiloje [the village where Prophet Mokaleng lived] as a teenager because I had a problem, but the prophet told me to stay. So I stayed with him for ten years. I was one of about ten teenagers who worked for Mokaleng, helping him in the treatment of the sick. I saw many people healed in startling ways—bones straightened, the blind able to see. He did many miracles in front of my own eyes. Mokaleng used a variety of methods—usually prayer, but not always. He sometimes used water, salt, ashes, or mud.

One crippled man was there for three weeks before he was healed. Suddenly one day the prophet told those supporting this man as he entered the church to let go of him. They feared he would fall, but suddenly he could walk, and started to sing happily. I saw such things not once but many, many times.

When interviewees communicated to me what was most important to them, they made themselves vulnerable to being treated with disbelief and skepticism. My North American church life had little experience of dramatic outpourings of the Holy Spirit. In my theological studies, we sought to find argumentative, descriptive words and propositions to express the nature of God. In the AICs, I was learning, the nature of God is communicated in story, mythic language, narrative, and communal memory.

My thoughts strayed from the track of historical scholarship as I listened to Moruti Moilwa's voice and watched his eyes. I sensed that he was searching his memory for recollections of those events that had changed the course of his life. How many lives, I thought, had been changed as they put their trust in Jesus under the influence of Prophet Mokaleng's ministry?

While I waited, I searched my own heart as well. Could I open my mind and heart to manifestations of God's power and grace that seemed so foreign to my own experience? At the conclusion of the interview, I knew that I, also, was being changed. I turned to Mr. Moilwa. "Moruti, you have been blessed to witness these things."

And so it went, as I soaked in the memories told to me by others who had been part of the story—Moruti Wright, Archbishop Israel Motswaosele, Moruti Molake, Mrs. Marumo, and many more. All of these stories came together, along with other research, into a printed history, *Ditso tsa Spiritual Healing Church mo Botswana*, for the use of the congregations and members of the church. Published in 1992 under the auspices of Mennonite Ministries in Botswana, the written account marked a quarter century of fruitful relationships between Mennonites and the Spiritual Healing Church in Botswana.

Testimony #4: “We are deepening the river of God’s people in Africa”

ALPHONSE GODONOU, BENIN

We can do nothing but give glory to God for what has happened at the Benin Bible Institute (BBI) in the past few years. What began as a small seed has grown into an enormous tree. The prophet Hosea in Old Testament times said that the destruction of God’s people will come through lack of knowledge.

It has often been said that the spirituality and biblical knowledge of the rapidly growing church in Africa is like a river “one mile wide and one inch deep.” That was true in Benin for many years and would still be true without the important ministry of the Benin Bible Institute, which grew up as a collaborative effort between the Mennonites and the church leaders of the many denominations here in Benin.

The most important thing that Mennonites did nearly four decades ago was refuse to found their own church and instead give themselves to training the hundreds of church leaders who already existed here in Benin, but with virtually no biblical formation. Today we see the result of that incredible insight of a commitment to building up the people of God across denominational boundaries.

I, myself, am a fruit of that important initiative, first as a student in the very first graduating class at BBI, and now for many years as the director of the Systematic Bible Training Program. Who would have ever believed that such a thing would happen? I can only thank God for his blessings in giving me the opportunity to serve the church in this important way. We are deepening the river of God’s people in Africa for many generations to come!

In Conclusion: A Compelling Gospel Image from Jesus

The working title we are using for this collection of essays is *“Unless a Grain of Wheat . . .”: A Story of Friendship between African-Initiated Churches and North American Mennonites*. Chapter titles, as already mentioned, will build on and

group around the agricultural themes of "tilling," "sowing," "harvesting," and so on to describe the wide range of experiences and relationships that have developed between Mennonites and AICs over the past sixty years.

The inspiration for this particular title and imagery came to us from Jonathan Larson, one of the editors of the collection, when he recounted for us the following story:

A distinguished Afrikaaner theologian with wire-rimmed glasses and a shock of white hair sat facing me at supper the first night of a conference on partnership with African-initiated churches. The gates of Nelson Mandela's prison had yet to swing open, and Mennonites were still personae non gratae in apartheid South Africa. Little wonder then that I should be studied so warily as a suspect guest.

When table chatter finally eased, the question came. Clearing his throat, the professor put it to me, "So, you're a Mennonite?" as though addressing some endangered species. I groped for a coherent response, mumbling something about "trying my best to be one."

And then the conversation took a wholly unexpected turn. "I have traveled all over southern Africa," he said, "and heard speak often of Mennonite workers, though never had the pleasure of actually meeting one. What's more, though you seem to have left footprints everywhere, I have yet to see any signboard, church, or institutional name with the label 'Mennonite' attached to it. It's extraordinary. You must be the last people on earth who still believe the saying of Jesus, 'Unless a grain of wheat fall in the ground and die, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'"

I remember thinking at the time that I wished his generous thought were entirely true of me or my colleagues. But his striking observation threw a shaft of light onto something quite rare in the practice of mission, or even church history: self-giving to kingdom pursuits without regard for sectarian credit or advantage. And that from this point of departure, there flowed a bracing freedom.

And what is more, the willingness to run those risks of loss was matched by the indigenous faith communities Mennonites encountered in various corners of Africa. In almost every case, individuals of prophetic bent and leaders within these movements faced off the misgivings of the time, the suspicions about more Western aggrandizement, to say that trustworthy friends had been sent by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with whom honest partnership was yet possible. They, too, cast some seed in the ground in faith that something exquisite and bountiful might result.

The generous insight of an Afrikaaner scholar, with that compelling gospel phrase of Jesus, aptly catches what lies at the heart of the stories we are

collecting from both North American Mennonites and the African-initiated churches.

“Unless a grain of wheat fall in the ground and die . . .”

In Africa today, changes are happening so rapidly that it is difficult, nearly impossible, to keep up. What this means for the future of the church on the continent is not certain. But what is clear is that new and fresh global partnership relationships will be required. It would be our hope that the lessons of earlier endeavors might contribute to correcting past mistakes and strengthening the body of Christ as it grows, both on African soil and—with increased assistance from African sisters and brothers—in the parched and thirsty land we call North America.

Mission Engagement in Nigeria in an Epoch of Partnership

A Case in the Anabaptist Tradition

R. BRUCE YODER¹

In 1958 a group of congregations in southeastern Nigeria solicited affiliation with the North American Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM), declared themselves Mennonite, and sought missionaries and assistance. MBM responded by sending missionaries and by providing assistance to Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) and others in the region. The collaboration between MCN and MBM developed during a period when partnership was becoming a primary paradigm in the Protestant missionary movement as well as in the Anabaptist tradition.

This article highlights five themes in the missiological discourse about partnership during the last half of the twentieth century and uses those themes to explicate aspects of the engagement between MCN and MBM during the same period. The themes are (1) collaboration, (2) context, (3) reconfiguration of mission structures, (4) bilateral and multilateral approaches, and (5) ambiguity.² The first section examines partnership in the Protestant mission movement. The second shows that these themes also arise in Anabaptist mission discourse. The third section presents the case of Mennonite Church Nigeria and Mennonite Board of Missions, showing the partnership paradigm to be a compelling missionary vision while clarifying challenges that may require consideration of additional mission models.

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2 These were the themes I gathered from perusing fifty-one articles that addressed partnership from 1933 to 2000 in the journals *The Review and Expositor*, *The Christian Century*, *International Review of Mission*, *The Reformed Journal*, *Brethren Life and Thought*, *Missiology*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, *African Ecclesial Review*, *Mission Studies*, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, *Baptist History and Heritage*, *Church & Society*, *Direction*, *Pneuma*, *Mid-Stream*, and *Diaskalia*.

Partnership Discourse in Protestant Missions

During the twentieth century, as churches that grew out of the Protestant missionary movement were gaining strength, partnership emerged as a new approach for a new era. As early as 1928, the International Missionary Council (IMC) suggested partnership as the way that the “younger” and “older” churches should relate.³ During the following decades, many nations in the Southern Hemisphere moved toward shedding colonial chains; southern churches sought self-government, and mission theorists anticipated that mission practice would need to change in the “new day.”⁴ The partnership paradigm gained prominence in the decade after World War II with the IMC statement “Partners in Obedience,” from its 1947 meeting in Whitby, Ontario.⁵ The meeting highlighted a sense of unity, mutuality, and common vision among participants from forty countries.⁶ The IMC envisioned that churches from traditionally mission-sending nations and churches from the Global South would work together to realize common mission initiatives. This was, in measure, a reversal of indigenous church theory in which mission was to come to an end with the establishment of an independent church.⁷

Collaboration

In the decades following the Whitby meeting, a strong motivating factor for those who espoused partnership was accomplishing their goals through collaboration. Mission leaders argued that churches and missions from the Northern and Southern Hemispheres needed to work together so that Christians around the world would consider themselves part of the church universal and share

3 International Missionary Council, *The Relation between the Younger and the Older Churches*, vol. 3, Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24–April 8, 1928 (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 173, 209–10.

4 Kenneth Scott Latourette, “The Need for Missions in the New Day,” *Review & Expositor*, April 1, 1936, 146–57; M. Theron Rankin, “New and Old in Missions in the Orient,” *Review & Expositor* 40, no. 4 (October 1943): 436–48.

5 International Missionary Council, “Partners in Obedience,” in *The Witness of a Revolutionary Church* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1947), 23–34.

6 International Missionary Council, *The Witness of a Revolutionary Church*; Kenneth Scott Latourette and William Richey Hogg, *Tomorrow Is Here: The Mission and World of the Church as Seen from the Meeting of the International Missionary Council at Whitby, Ontario, July 5–24, 1947* (New York: Friendship, 1948).

7 Edmund Ilogu, “The Biblical Idea of Partnership and the Modern Missionary Task,” *International Review of Mission*, October 1, 1955, 404–6; John Hesselink, “The Future of the Christian World Mission,” *The Reformed Journal*, October 1971, 14–17.

responsibility for the missionary task.⁸ The goal was to empower the whole church for mission and to use resources efficiently.⁹

Context

A second theme in the partnership discourse is the importance of the context in which mission happens. In the postcolonial context, churches from all nations needed to work together as equal and worthy partners.¹⁰ Since cultural, social, and religious contexts complicated collaboration, foreign and local partners needed to understand places vastly different from their home societies.¹¹ The particularities of each church, people, and country had to be considered so that linguistic, cultural, historical, social, economic, and political diversity could enrich instead of hinder partnerships.¹²

Reconfiguring Mission Structures

In a third theme of discourse, partnership advocates argued for the reconfiguration of colonial-era mission structures that often perpetuated inequalities and power differentials.¹³ Mission agencies such as the Paris Mission Society, London Missionary Society, Commonwealth Missionary Society, Basel Mission, United Evangelical Mission, and Caribbean/North American Council for Mission formed new structures in an attempt to share power and resources

8 International Missionary Council, *The Witness of a Revolutionary Church*, 24; Feliciano V. Carino, "Partnership in Obedience," *International Review of Mission* 67, no. 267 (July 1978): 324–26; "Consultation on 'Partnership in Mission—What Structures?'" *International Review of Mission* 81, no. 323 (July 1992): 468–69; Charles Klagba, "Salvador and Relationships in Mission: Partnership in Mission," *International Review of Mission* 86, no. 340 (April 1997): 133–35.

9 International Missionary Council, *The Witness of a Revolutionary Church*, 20–21.

10 "Partnership in Indonesia," *The Christian Century* 68, no. 41 (October 10, 1951): 1151–52; Carino, "Partnership in Obedience"; Maitland Evans, "The Council for World Mission's Partnership in Mission Model," *International Review of Mission* 76, no. 304 (October 1987): 458–72.

11 "Max A. C. Warren, *Partnership: The Study of an Idea* (Chicago, IL: S.C.M. Book Club, 1956), 90–97.

12 Erme R. Camba, "Partnership in Mission: The United Church of Christ in the Philippines," *Church and Society* 84, no. 1 (October 1993): 87.

13 Robin Green, "God Is Doing a New Thing: A Theological Reflection on the Practice of Partnership," *International Review of Mission* 80, no. 318 (April 1991): 219–29; Klagba, "Salvador and Relationships in Mission: Partnership in Mission," 135; John P. Brown, "International Relationships in Mission," *International Review of Mission* 86, no. 342 (July 1997): 245–46.

more equitably, increase transparency, and enable horizontal partnerships.¹⁴ While such initiatives provided new avenues to seek partnership, the inequitable political and economic realities between northern and southern churches sometimes frustrated initiatives that sought equity and mutuality.¹⁵

Bilateral and Multilateral Approaches

Tension between bilateral relationship and a broader multilateral approach is a fourth theme in partnership discourse. A bilateral mission relationship typically involved a Western mission and the church it founded. In 1958 Lesslie Newbigin introduced the concept of “Mission—from six continents to six continents,” suggesting a web of mission relationships, and in 1963 the World Council of Church’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism met in Mexico under the same theme.¹⁶ Networks sprang up to envision and facilitate partnerships within and between regions. In many cases, however, financial and personnel assistance continued to flow through bilateral channels, often controlled by funders from the Northern Hemisphere.¹⁷ Bilateral relationships remained attractive partly because they facilitated personal contacts and engagement better than did multi-partner networks.¹⁸ Sometimes energy and resources expended in bilateral relationships between northern and southern churches resulted in less attention to multilateral partnerships among churches in southern regions.

Ambiguity

The partnership paradigm provided a vision but remained elusive and did not deliver a fully orb ed approach. The communion, equality, and mutuality ev-

14 Evans, “The Council for World Mission’s Partnership in Mission Model”; Brown, “International Relationships in Mission,” 218–21, 226–34.

15 Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “North-South Partnerships: The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa and the Département Missionnaire in Lausanne,” *International Review of Mission* 83, no. 328 (January 1994): 93–100.

16 Wilbert R. Shenk, *God’s New Economy: Interdependence and Mission*, 28; Brown, “International Relationships in Mission,” 215–16.

17 Herbert Schekatz, “Learning the Meaning of Partnership: The Story of the Continental Commission for Church and Mission in Indonesia,” *International Review of Mission* 62, no. 248 (October 1973): 415–24; Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, *Partnership For Mission: A View from the Two-Thirds World* (Bangalore, India: Partnership in Mission-Asia, 1983), 12; Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, “Mission Agencies as Multinationals,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7, no. 4 (October 1983): 152–53; Maluleke, “North-South Partnerships—The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa and the Département Missionnaire in Lausanne,” 99–100.

18 Joachim Wietzke, “Renewed Communities in Mission and International Mission Structures,” *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 316 (October 1990): 472.

ident at Whitby led Yale church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette and his co-author William Hogg to declare with a certain sense of eschatological fervor that “tomorrow is here.”¹⁹ It seemed that the world Christian community and its mission efforts had reached a significant milestone with a shift from paternalism and dependency to fraternity and shared responsibility. Partnership, however, was open to varying interpretations, was often elusive, and did not provide answers to all mission questions. A decade after Whitby, Max Warren opined that, because domination was still a reality in the world, partnership had “not yet fully come.”²⁰ Partnerships sometimes embodied inequality or left one or more partners without a voice.²¹ Mission agencies varied in their approaches, sharing power to different degrees.²²

As the end of the twentieth century approached, missiologists noted that despite a consensus about the importance of partnership, the mission movement had often failed to embody the partnership vision.²³ Ongoing disparities in wealth, education, and development made mutuality and equity elusive.²⁴ Finally, the partnership paradigm focused on the “how” of doing mission, but did not address the basic questions of who was to be included in partnership and what partners would work together to achieve.²⁵ The “who” and “what” of mission required additional conceptual tools and models.

Partnership Discourse in Anabaptist Missions

Among churches in the Anabaptist tradition, the matter of the relationship between the younger churches—typically in Asia, South America, and Africa—and the older churches that had birthed them became increasingly relevant. North American church leaders sought to deepen connections with the south-

19 Latourette and Hogg, *Tomorrow Is Here*.

20 Warren, *Partnership: The Study of an Idea*, 98.

21 Robbins Strong, “Practical Partnership with Churches Overseas,” *International Review of Mission* 61, no. 243 (July 1972): 281–82.

22 Nicole Fischer, “Towards Reconciled Communities in Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 316 (October 1990): 484.

23 Wietzke, “Renewed Communities in Mission and International Mission Structures,” 471.

24 Maluleke, “North-South Partnerships—The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa and the Département Missionnaire in Lausanne”; Evans, “The Council for World Mission’s Partnership in Mission Model,” 461–62, 468; Wietzke, “Renewed Communities in Mission and International Mission Structures,” 474–76.

25 Justin S. Ukpong, “Contemporary Theological Models of Mission: Analysis and Critique,” *AFER* 27, no. 3 (June 1, 1985): 166; Stanley H. Skreslet, “The Empty Basket of Presbyterian Mission: Limits and Possibilities of Partnership,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 19, no. 3 (July 1995): 98–104.

ern churches, and partnership became a theme by the mid-1960s.²⁶ “Obedience in Partnership” was the theme of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference in 1963, and two years later, MBM’s annual gathering met under the topic “Partners in World Mission.”²⁷ MBM’s 1965 report on overseas mission noted, “Partnership with the emerging church is key to sound mission strategy.”²⁸ The Council of Mission Board Secretaries and its subsequent form, the Council of International Ministries (CIM), addressed the topic of partnership and its corollary themes of internationalization and interdependence a number of times throughout the 1970s and 1980s.²⁹ Mennonite World Conference gatherings on mission at San Juan, Puerto Rico (1975); Hesston, Kansas (1978); and Strasburg, France (1984) urged mutuality, strengthened solidarity, and led to broader collaboration among Anabaptist mission initiatives.³⁰

The themes prevalent in the larger Protestant mission movement are evident in Anabaptist mission discourse as well. Anabaptist missiologists argued that collaboration among international partners would benefit all involved and would contribute to the growth of the kingdom of God.³¹ In 1980 Robert Ramseyer suggested that working with people of other cultures and traditions helped missionaries broaden their understanding of the gospel and of mission engagement, and in 1994 Mennonite Brethren missiologists proposed international mission teams.³²

Contextual factors were also of concern. In the 1960s missiologists worried that the schools and health institutions that missionaries had established

26 John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, “Memo on Definition of ‘Partnership’ Relationship,” September 15, 1964, and A. J. Metzler to P. J. Malagar and Joseph M. Bhelwa, October 8, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Partnership 1964. All primary sources, unless otherwise noted, are from Mennonite Church USA Archives, Elkhart, IN.

27 Shenk, *God’s New Economy*, 2; “Executive Report,” in *Partners in World Mission 1965: General Mission Handbook Including Annual Reports* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1965), 9–19.

28 *Partners in World Mission 1965: General Mission Handbook Including Annual Reports* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1965), 76.

29 Shenk, *God’s New Economy*, 3, 37.

30 “San Juan Statement,” “Hesston Statement,” and “Strasbourg Statement,” in *God’s New Economy: Interdependence and Mission* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1988), 52–61.

31 *Partners in World Mission 1965: General Mission Handbook Including Annual Reports*, 248–49; Valdemar Kröker, “Can Mission Agencies Be Partners? A Response,” *Direction* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 87.

32 Robert L. Ramseyer, “Partnership and Interdependence,” *International Review of Mission* 69, no. 273 (January 1980): 34; Harold Ens, “Internationalization: Where Are Those ‘Ends of The Earth?’” *Direction* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 85; Kröker, “Can Mission Agencies Be Partners? A Response,” 87.

were based on the needs and robust economies of mission-sending nations and were neither appropriate nor sustainable in newly postcolonial nations.³³ In the decades that followed, missiologists noted that different worldviews and value systems among worldwide Anabaptist churches required sharing and discussion in order to find common ground.³⁴ In the 1960s, mission agency administrators highlighted the need to modify structures in order to facilitate better partnership, as did participants at the 1975 MWC San Juan meeting.³⁵ MBM sought to encourage multilateral relationships, linking the North American Mennonite Church and the churches MBM had established in the Southern Hemisphere in order to extend connections beyond the mission agency.³⁶ Within the broader purview of interagency collaboration, CIM called for cooperation among North American agencies and their international partners, for stronger regional bodies, and for MWC leadership to bring about such relationships.³⁷

Anabaptist discourse demonstrates a certain tension between partnership vision and reality. For MBM in the 1960s, partnership signaled a move from a strong leadership role to one of supporting the initiatives of the churches it had helped to create.³⁸ MBM committed itself to strive for equality and dialogue and to trust the leadership of its partners. The 1975 MWC San Juan meeting noted, however, the continuing cultural hegemony of Northern Hemisphere churches.³⁹ Twelve years after San Juan, CIM reiterated the continuing challenge of achieving mutuality and partnership and looked to MWC to “develop appropriate structures for global mission, including the discernment of priorities and sharing of resources.”⁴⁰

33 John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, Memo on Definition of ‘Partnership’ Relationship.

34 Shenk, *God’s New Economy*, 30; Takashi Manabe, “Internationalization Must Replace Paternalism: A Response,” *Direction* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 89–90.

35 Vernon J. Sprunger to Mission Secretaries, June 13, 1960, IV-18-03-02, Box 9, Mennonite World Conference 1962; Vernon J. Sprunger to Mission Secretaries, July 18, 1960, IV-18-03-02, Box 9, Mennonite World Conference 1962; “1962 World Conference Missions Section Program Proposals”; Charles R. Taber, “Structures and Strategies for Interdependence in World Mission,” *Mission Focus* 6, no. 6 (September 1978): 3–10; “San Juan Statement.”

36 A. J. Metzler to P. J. Malagar and Joseph M. Bhelwa.

37 “Minneapolis Statement,” in *God’s New Economy: Interdependence and Mission* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1988), 62–64.

38 *Partners in World Mission 1965*, 76–79, 218–19.

39 “San Juan Statement.”

40 “Minneapolis Statement,” 64.

Mennonite Church Nigeria in the Partnership Era

The congregations that became Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) were located in the area that today corresponds roughly to the northern half of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria and were part of the Ibibio people, large numbers of whom came to affiliate with the Christian faith during the first half of the twentieth century. It was the Qua Iboe Mission (QIM), an interdenominational, evangelical Irish mission, that, according to agreements between Protestant missions in the region, held responsibility to evangelize much of Ibibioland and from which many of the MCN congregations had seceded.⁴¹ The QIM entered the region in 1887 and by 1902 had admitted “about 700” people into membership.⁴² The 1921 Nigerian census estimated that in Calabar province, which included all of Ibibioland and parts of the neighboring Igboland, there were 165,202 Christians—17 percent of the population.⁴³ From 1937 to 1939, QIM missionaries reported so many seeking to join the church that they could not cope with the situation.⁴⁴ By 1953 the census put the number of Christians in the province at 1,186,653—77 percent of the population.⁴⁵ It identified the Abak, Enyong, Ikot Ekpene, and Uyo divisions—where MCN congregations were located—as 59.3 percent, 75.1 percent, 63.7 percent, and 91.3 percent Christian respectively.⁴⁶

Ibibioland was a hotbed of independent churches that worked outside the authority of the QIM and other foreign missions.⁴⁷ Such independency was

41 E. A. Udo, “The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900–52,” in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, ed. O. U. Kalu (London: Longman, 1980), 159–81; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria—Edwin Weaver 1959.

42 Robert L. M’Keown, *In the Land of the Oil Rivers: The Story of the Qua Iboe Mission* (London: Marshal Brothers, 1902), 153.

43 Percy Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*, vol. 4 (London: F. Cass, 1969), 104.

44 Richard J. Graham, “The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887–1945” (PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1984), 285, 495.

45 Nigeria, Department of Statistics, *Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1953* (Lagos: Census Superintendent, 1955), 42.

46 Nigeria, Department of Statistics, 42.

47 Independency was a characteristic of the wider African Christian movement and not unique to Ibibioland. See Afe Adogame and Lazio Jafta, “Zionists, Aladura and Roho: African Instituted Churches,” in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007), 271–87 and Kevin Ward, “Africa,” in *A World History of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 221–23.

bolstered in 1927 by a spiritual revival, which spread from its beginnings in the QIM and resulted in new autonomous Christian movements.⁴⁸ By 1966, when MBM missionaries Edwin and Irene Weaver—the first resident MBM missionaries in Nigeria—organized a survey of the town of Abak, there were two hundred and fifty-one congregations within a five-mile radius of the town.⁴⁹ Eighty-nine were independent.⁵⁰ One hundred twenty-four congregations were affiliated with eight denominations that had arrived to the region during the middle decades of the century from North America, Europe, or other regions in Nigeria.⁵¹ The remaining thirty-eight congregations belonged to the QIM, in whose comity area Abak fell.⁵² Highlighting this steam of autonomous African Christianity, David Barrett's 1968 study identified the Ibibio as having "probably the densest concentration of independency in all Africa."⁵³

It was from this region of relatively high association with Christianity and independency that a group of independent congregations wrote to MBM asking for affiliation. That MCN would emerge from such an invitation was a characteristic of southeastern Nigeria.⁵⁴ The Qua Iboe Mission arrived in 1887 in response to an invitation from the chiefs near the mouth of the Qua Iboe River.⁵⁵ The Primitive Methodists arrived in 1899 at the invitation of King James Egbo Bassy, who had started a school for which he sought missionary assistance.⁵⁶ Once the Christian movement took root, existing churches

48 Monday B. Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaime Christian Mission: Towards a History of an Ibibio Independent Church," *Africa* 59 (1989): 500–503.

49 I. U. Nsarak et al., "The Abak Story," Research Report (Inter Church Study Team, February 1967), HM-696, Box 6, Folder 3, The Abak Story.

50 I. U. Nsarak et al., 1–28.

51 I. U. Nsarak et al., 35–36.

52 I. U. Nsarak et al., 35.

53 David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 291.

54 Affiliation and exchanges between African independents and foreign missions was a characteristic of Ibibioland but not unique to it. See Adam Mohr, "Faith Tabernacle Congregation and the Emergence of Pentecostalism in Colonial Nigeria, 1910s–1941," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 43 (2013): 71–97; Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 181–91; Deidre Helen Crumbley, *Spirit, Structure, and Flesh: Gendered Experiences in African Initiated Churches among the Yoruba of Nigeria* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 17–18, 28–32.

55 Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission," 30–37; Eva Stuart Watt, *The Quest for Souls in Qua Iboe* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1951), 1–19.

56 S. K. Okpo, *A Brief History of the Methodist Church in Eastern Nigeria* (Oron, Nigeria: Manson, 1985), 1–13; Edet Akpan Udo, "The Methodist Contribution to Ed-

would invite foreign missions or denominations. The Apostolic Church (1931), Lutheran Church (1936), Assemblies of God (1939), Church of Christ (1952), and Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (1960s) were churches in south-eastern Nigeria that took on the confessional identity of foreign churches and missions that responded, sometimes hesitantly, to requests for assistance and/or affiliation.⁵⁷

In July 1958 Matthew Ekereke, secretary of the independent Saint John's Baptist Church in Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, wrote to MBM missionary Paul Peachy in Japan, asking if his church's sixty congregations could affiliate with MBM and adopt its name and teachings.⁵⁸ Members of Ekereke's church had obtained Peachy's address from M. D. Akpan of the Universal Pentecostal Church, information that had been on a tract, and they had learned of the Mennonites from MBM's *Way to Life* broadcasts from the ELWA (Eternal Love Winning Africa) radio station in Liberia.⁵⁹ Peachy sent Ekereke's request to S. J. Hostetler, an MBM missionary in Ghana, who in turn forwarded literature about the Mennonites to Ekereke.⁶⁰ By the time Hostetler visited the church in November, it had taken on the name The Mennonite Church.⁶¹ In

ucation in Eastern Nigeria, 1893–1960” (PhD dissertation, Boston University, 1965), 65–70.

57 Mohr, “Faith Tabernacle Congregation,” 210–11; Edet William Amamkpa, *A Short History of Ibesikpo* ([Place of publication not identified]: [Amamkpa:], 1979), 33–39; Henry Nau, *We Move into Africa: First Lutheran Mission in Nigeria, Africa* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1945); Reba C. Goff, *The Great Nigeria Mission* (Nashville: Lawrence Avenue Church of Christ, 1964); D. Dmitri Hurlbut, “The LDS Church and the Problem of Race: Mormonism in Nigeria 1946–1978,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 51, no. 1 (2018):1–16. The LDS church in Nigeria was “unofficial” until church authorities in the United States gave church members with black skin the ability to hold the Priesthood in 1978.

58 Matthew Ekereke to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 25, 1958; and Paul Peachy to Matthew Ekereke, August 22, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958–1960.

59 Matthew Ekereke to Paul Peachy, September 2, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958–1960; S. J. Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in Calabar Province,” November 28, 1958, IV-18-13, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-1959; I. U. Nsagak, *Africa in Three Dimensions*, DVD (converted from 16mm film), written and directed by Ken Anderson (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1967).

60 S. J. Hostetler to Matthew Ekereke, October 21, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958–1960.

61 S. J. Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province.”

December, MBM authorized Hostetler to receive the Nigerian congregations into the Mennonite fold.⁶²

Collaboration

In the relationship that developed between MCN and MBM, each party hoped to better attain its goals by working together. For example, schooling and healthcare were important components of Christian missionary activity. MCN had neither schools nor health institutions and in its conference proceedings and communications repeatedly solicited help from MBM to fill the void.⁶³ MBM provided scholarships for church members to study at secondary, vocational, and Bible schools.⁶⁴ MBM doctors and nurses implemented short-term health clinics in some of the communities where there were MCN congregations.⁶⁵ MCN also sought to solidify its confessional identity and capitalized on its relationship with the mission agency to integrate into the Mennonite movement beyond Nigeria.⁶⁶ MBM facilitated attendance at international Mennonite events and organized visits of representatives of North American Mennonite institutions to Nigeria.

For its part, MBM had mission goals that it furthered via the relationship with MCN. The mission agency had sought an African field since the late

62 J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 17, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

63 “Convention of Mennonite Church of Jesus Christ Inc. Nigeria,” Meeting Report (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono: Mennonite Church Nigeria, February 12, 1959) and Matthew Ekereke et al., “Welcome Address from the People of Ibiono to Mr. and Mrs. Hostetler,” February 15, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; P. E. Udo et al., “Welcome Address Presented by the People of Ibiono to Bishop J. D. Graber,” March 29, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

64 I. U. Nsagak, “Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria),” (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono: Mennonite Church Nigeria, April 10, 1961), IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria National Correspondence 1961 Confidential; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 29, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

65 John Grasse to J. D. Graber, September 24, 1962, and John Grasse to John H. Yoder, October 26, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria—Abiriba Hospital, 1962.

66 Matthew Ekereke Umanah et al., “Presentation from Mennonite Church, Nigeria to J. D. Graber,” December 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June–Dec 1960; Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 3, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria—Mennonite Church 1969–74; I. U. Nsagak to J. D. Graber, April 11, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria National Correspondence 1961–1962; Donald Jacobs to Africa Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Fellowship, May 26, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsagak and Standard Bank of West Africa, Calabar, July 9, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra—June 1 to Dec 31, 1969.

1920s but only in 1957 entered Ghana.⁶⁷ Collaboration with MCN helped fulfill the goal of work in Africa and added to the global Anabaptist movement. S. J. Hostetler, the first MBM representative to visit MCN, reported excitedly that the group of Nigerian congregations would be the mission agency's largest church to date.⁶⁸

MBM missionaries also came to believe that aspects of their wider ministry engagement in the region depended on their relationship with MCN. For example, missionaries found there was deep distrust and resentment among churches, so they developed a ministry of interchurch reconciliation. Mission churches such as the Qua Iboe accused the independents of promoting a sub-par Christian faith, said that they should return to the mission churches, and discouraged MBM from working with them.⁶⁹ Independents valued their autonomy and resented colonial attitudes among foreign missionaries. MCN expressed this view sharply during one of Hostetler's visits in February 1959:

Nigeria today is not like Nigeria of yesterday. We are at present struggling to take our stand among the Nations of the world as an independent country; and of course, naturally, we must be beset with difficulties. At this transitional period of ours, which you come to meet us, we have to advise you not to look on us from the angle you look upon the people of America or England, but to look on us from the perspective of a child beginning to tread about the house. It will be difficult for you to work in our midst if you will not be able to appreciate our efforts and difficulties, and be prepared to stand firm by us, and support us in every way possible, to retain our independence on a balance as we have already marched to its threshold. . . . Beware of the dogs that bark and bite around Christian

67 I. E. Burkhardt, "The Call of Africa, (A) The Unoccupied Territory" and D. D. Miller, "The Call of Africa, (B) Our Obligations and Limitations," in *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1929), 65–73; J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, October 13, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 4, Orie O. 1954–1955; S. Jay Hostetler, "First Missionaries Arrive in Ghana," in *The Living Church in Action: The 52nd Annual Meeting of the MBMC* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1958), 29–31.

68 S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 28, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956–59.

69 Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria—Edwin Weaver 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria, Jan–May 1960. Resistance by foreign missions to moves for autonomy by African churches and African anti-missionary sentiments during decolonization was not unique to the QIM and Ibibioland. See Ogbu U. Kalu, "Passive Revolution and Its Saboteurs: African Christian Initiative in the Era of Decolonization, 1955–1975," in *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, ed. Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 255–67.

institutions in this country. By dogs we mean certain missionaries from other denominations. . . . These are the brand of imperialist [sic] and their stooges who find it impossible to adapt themselves to the changing conditions of Nigeria.⁷⁰

Hoping to encourage reconciliation, missionaries sought to gain the trust of churches of all stripes. They noted that work with MCN allowed them to show their commitment to Christian faith and demonstrate their integrity, thus building trust with leaders in the wider church community for their ministry of interchurch reconciliation.⁷¹

Political Context, Schools, and Indigenization

MCN's strong anticolonial rhetoric highlights the political context in which the relationship between the church and MBM developed. Nigerians voted for the representatives in their first independent government just weeks after Edwin and Irene Weaver arrived in November of 1959, although the formal transfer of power would not happen until ten months later.⁷² As part of a society moving toward independence, MCN would not accept colonial attitudes and, furthermore, communicated its displeasure clearly when it disagreed with MBM. For example, from its first contacts with the mission agency, MCN asked MBM to help create schools for the church.⁷³ When MBM instead provided scholarships for members to attend existing schools in the area, MCN expressed gratitude but repeatedly called on MBM to change its approach in favor of establishing Mennonite schools.⁷⁴

70 Ekereke et al., "Welcome Address from the People of Ibiono to Mr. and Mrs. Hostetler."

71 Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 29, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria—Edwin I. Weaver 1966; Wilbert R. Shenk to Verney Unruh, October 27, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, General Conference Mennonite Board of Missions 1966–69; Edwin Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript," 1968, 6–7, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship.

72 Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria—Edwin Weaver, 1959; Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 156.

73 "Convention of Mennonite Church of Jesus Christ, Nigeria," Meeting Report (Ikot Ada Idem, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, February 12, 1959) and Welcome Address from the People of Ibiono to Mr. and Mrs. Hostetler, February 15, 1959, HM 1563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958–1960; Welcome Address Presented by the People of Ibiono to Bishop J. D. Graber, March 29, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956–1959.

74 Edwin Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria," February 6, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Annual Mission Board Meeting 1961; List of Scholarship Students 1964, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 1, Schools and Scholarships; Edwin Weaver to John

In 1967 the Nigerian civil war forced most MBM missionaries to evacuate and intensified MCN's resolve. Joint Church Aid, a project of thirty-five aid agencies, reacted to the starvation and disease that the war caused by flying in some forty million pounds of food and medical assistance.⁷⁵ This support allowed the secessionist Biafra to hold out in the face of Federal government advances longer than would have been possible otherwise.⁷⁶ The government blamed the aid for prolonging suffering from the war and subsequently sought to counter such foreign intervention, in the process deporting missionaries who had participated with, or voiced support for, the Biafra cause, and refusing visas to new missionaries whose assistance did not fit within its postwar reconstruction priorities.⁷⁷

MCN flexed its muscles in a similar way. Church members identified with the Federalist narrative against the Biafra project and insisted that MBM would have to prioritize MCN's desire for proprietary institutions.⁷⁸ I. U. Nsasak, general secretary of MCN during much of the 1960s and 1970s and a close collaborator of MBM missionaries, described Federalist forces as liberators, lamented MBM's lack of institution-building before the war, and asserted that if the mission agency wanted to work in southeastern Nigeria, it would have to

H. Yoder, March 18, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Nsasak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; Nsasak, I. U., "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria," April 25–27, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra—Jan 1 to May 31, 1969.

75 Ken Waters, "Influencing the Message: The Role of Catholic Missionaries in Media Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War," *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (October 2004): 697–718.

76 Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 175–78.

77 Waters, "Influencing the Message"; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria-Biafra—Sept to Dec 1968; C. A. Ekere to The Divisional Officer, Uyo, January 4, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra—Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report–Nigeria, February 25–March 8, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Administrative Trip Resources 1970–1974.

78 E. J. Akam to Edwin Weaver, April 15, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1966–1968 Confidential; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin and Irene Weaver, September 6, 1968, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; O. P. Ibok to Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, July 19, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra—Jan to Aug 1968. Identification with the Federalist narrative against Biafra was common among the Ibibio and other minority peoples in the region. See Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 175–76 and Egodi Uchendu, "Recollections of Childhood Experiences during the Nigerian Civil War," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 77, no. 3 (2007): 393–418.

provide material assistance such as schools, a hospital, or agricultural support.⁷⁹ MCN leader Peter Ibok wrote to Edwin and Irene Weaver that if MBM would not establish institutions such as schools and hospitals, there was no need to send missionaries.⁸⁰ He asked, “As a friend I would like to know from you why our mission board is not prepared to build anything which will be permanent in this our state like any other long standing mission in Nigeria.”⁸¹

MCN’s request for schools and MBM’s hesitancy to provide such educational infrastructure highlights the complexities that can arise in partnership relationships. In this case, each partner acted out of its context and background. Since the establishment of schools had been an important part of the work of foreign missions in southeastern Nigeria in the past, MCN logically expected such would be included in MBM’s ministry.⁸² MBM was hesitant, however, because of its mission history and its adherence to indigenous church principles, which stipulated that missionaries should establish churches that would be self-financing, self-administering, and self-propagating. In India, when MBM had established institutions such as schools and hospitals, the administration and financing of these institutions appeared to burden the church.⁸³ As a result, MBM and church leaders restructured them as independent entities.⁸⁴ As veterans of the India work, the Weavers were adamant that they would avoid saddling MCN with institutions that would encumber the church with excessive needs of finances, personnel, time, and energy, especially since

79 O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsagak to Mennonite Board of Missions, November 11, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra—Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; I. U. Nsagak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968; I. U. Nsagak to Mennonite Board of Missions, October 20, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra—June 1 to Dec 31, 1969; I. U. Nsagak to Edwin Weaver, October 20, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsagak, I. U.

80 O. P. Ibok to Edwin and Irene Weaver, July 19, 1969.

81 O. P. Ibok to Edwin and Irene Weaver, July 19, 1969.

82 William H. Taylor, “The Presbyterian Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14, no. 3 (1983): 223–45; P. B. Clarke, “The Methods and Ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1885–1905,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6, no. 2 (1974): 81–108; Edet Akpan Udo, “The Methodist Contribution to Education in Eastern Nigeria, 1893–1960” (PhD dissertation, Boston University, 1965); Magnus O. Bassey, “Missionary Rivalry and Educational Expansion in Southern Nigeria, 1885–1932,” *Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 1 (1991): 36–46.

83 Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 25, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951–1955; Edwin Weaver, “Some Principles to Be Considered in Charting the Future Course of the Church,” April 25, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 3, India-Unification Commission 1950–1953.

84 J. D. Graber to Ernest Bennett and John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 1 Administrative Travel—JD Graber 1959–60; John H. Yoder to David Shank et al., March 22, 1960, HM 1-48, Box 116, European Missions 1959–1960.

there were already many schools and healthcare institutions in southeastern Nigeria.⁸⁵ Instead, MBM provided scholarships for students to study at existing schools.⁸⁶ Scholarship assistance was a way to respond to MCN's need for schooling while protecting MBM's concern for the financial and administrative integrity of the indigenous church.

After the Nigerian civil war, the relationship between MBM and MCN continued without resident missionaries.⁸⁷ Left on their own, church leaders established the Mennonite Theological Seminary, which was a secondary school with the option of a Bible-school curriculum.⁸⁸ With the dual programs for secular study and leadership training for the church, MCN leaders sought to fulfill the church's desire for schools in a structure that was likely to draw mission agency backing. For a decade, MBM provided financial assistance to the seminary in order to contribute to the theological training of MCN leaders.⁸⁹

Economic realities created power differentials in this case and resulted in a certain ambiguity in the search for mutuality and equity. While MBM's resources were limited, the wealth of the North American economy allowed the mission agency to assist partners like MCN. The church, on the other hand, existed in a context in which there were fewer financial resources. An implicit power differential existed in that MCN sought financial assistance and MBM was able to decide which initiatives it would fund. The church would have preferred that MBM help it establish schools but had little choice when the mission agency provided scholarships instead. In the post-civil war context, MCN voiced its protest more resolutely than it had earlier.

MBM was not blind to the power differentials and sought to mitigate them in some measure. After the civil war, MBM shifted some decision-making power to MCN, designating its assistance as a block grant to allow the church

85 Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria—Edwin Weaver 1959.

86 Edwin Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo," March 25, 1966, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957–1973.

87 Wilbert R. Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report—Nigeria."

88 Warren L. Grasse, "Report of Visitation of Nigerian Mennonite Areas," March 6, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria—Biafra—Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; J. Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk and Edwin Weaver, July 20, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 41, Stan and Dee Friesen.

89 Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, October 20, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Obong, August 25, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria Scholarships 1970–72; "Analysis of Budget Funds for Nigeria Support and Program," July 29, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Mennonite Church 1980–1984.

the freedom to decide how to invest it.⁹⁰ Yielding to MCN, MBM funded the construction of buildings for the Mennonite Theological Seminary, despite the mission agency's conviction that infrastructure-heavy institutions were costly to maintain and not in the best interest of the church.⁹¹

Mission Structures

In Nigeria, MBM sought to avoid colonial-era structures that inhibited mutuality. It rejected, for example, the "mission station" approach in which missionary residences and mission institutions were located together in large compounds.⁹² MBM scattered smaller groups of missionaries among different places and ministries where they lived in housing comparable to that of their Nigerian co-workers. They sought to identify with the people with whom they worked, rather than set themselves apart. Missionaries wanted to be active members of MCN but not create a mission organization whose authority structures would parallel or supersede that of the church.⁹³ Four years after arriving in Nigeria, MBM did create a Field Coordinating Committee that it tasked with managing information, advising MBM, and problem-solving, but it did not have the infrastructure traditionally associated with mission agencies.⁹⁴

For its part, MCN critiqued the way MBM's approach resulted in less investment in infrastructure that might have added to the church's patrimony. Missionaries rented residences as well as the site where they initiated an interdenominational Bible school, rather than invest in properties that could have become assets of MCN. The church called on MBM to invest in proprietary, permanent missionary housing and Bible school facilities rather than renting.⁹⁵ Nsagak and MCN executive committee chairman, O. E. Essiet, wrote, "In

90 Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Obong, June 7, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria-Mennonite Church 1969-1974.

91 "Analysis of Budget Funds for Nigeria Support and Program."

92 J. D. Graber, *The Church Apostolic: A Discussion of Modern Missions* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1960), 41-43; Irene Weaver to Esther Graber, February 9, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1960-1965 Confidential; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 17, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria-Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1970), 81-83; Irene Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, Transcript (Elkhart, IN, 1983), 44, Mennonite Mission Network.

93 Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo."

94 John H. Yoder to Nigeria Field Coordinating Committee, January 9, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, John Howard Yoder, 1963-1964; Lloyd Fisher, "Field Coordinating Committee Meeting," (Ikot Inyang, Nigeria: Field Coordinating Committee, MBMC Nigeria, January 24, 1964), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria-Lloyd Fisher 1964.

95 "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," January 20, 1966, 9-11, 27-28, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1966, 27; O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsagak to Men-

our culture we interpret the continual renting of residences by missionaries as signs of temporary concerns in the area where they engage in work. We look forward to a permanency of Mission Board's witness in Nigeria."⁹⁶ Nigerian Mennonites certainly wanted to set aside colonial attitudes in favor of increased mutuality but also saw the disadvantage of decreased institutional investment that accompanied the eclipse of the mission station.⁹⁷

Bilateral Versus Multilateral Partnerships

MCN invited MBM to Nigeria to establish a bilateral relationship, but missionaries and church leaders developed broader affiliations. Edwin Weaver spent much time developing opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and reconciliation among independent churches and between independents and mission churches.⁹⁸ Weaver came to believe that relationship and discernment with other churches in the region were more important for MCN than was its relationship with MBM or the North American church.⁹⁹ Churches that shared similar cultural and religious contexts would be better able to assist each other in deliberations about belief and practice, he thought. Weaver even suggested that the church drop the term "Mennonite" from its name.¹⁰⁰ Given the deep distrust between mission churches and independent churches in the region, Weaver proposed that MCN would be better able to build trust with independents if it did not have an explicitly Western denominational identity.

MCN participated in MBM's initiatives to build trust and collaboration among churches in southeastern Nigeria but resisted the suggestion that such engagement should characterize its relationship with the mission agency. It

nonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 11, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra-Jan 1 to May 31, 1969.

96 O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsagak, "Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church of Nigeria to Wilbert R. Shenk and Vern Preheim," March 2, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria-Mennonite Church 1969-1974.

97 African churches have sometimes found it useful to perpetuate mission agency structures even after decolonization; e.g., Maia Green, *Priests, Witches and Power: Popular Christianity after Mission in Southern Tanzania* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 46-59.

98 Weaver and Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 89-93, 105-15.

99 Edwin Weaver, "A Report to the Eastern Region Council," September 19, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 20, Christian Council of Nigeria; Edwin Weaver to Alan Griffiths, April 15, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," January 20, 1966, 9-11, 27-28, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1966.

100 "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 9-11, 27-28; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-1967.

sought to reinforce its bilateral connection to MBM and its Mennonite identity. MCN did not accept Weaver's proposal that it drop "Mennonite" from its name.¹⁰¹ The church emphasized the role of MBM in its founding and communicated forcefully that, due to the church's Mennonite identity, MBM should give it priority among the mission agency's many inter-confessional initiatives in the region.¹⁰² The bilateral connection provided MCN with relationships with resident missionaries and international partners as well as with agricultural and scholarship assistance, which the church valued. The multilateral approach via MBM's collaboration with a wide array of partners appeared less beneficial to MCN and raised questions about the partnership's priorities and about who should be involved.

The story of Nigerian and North American Mennonites working together during the last half of the twentieth century highlights some of the same issues that missiologists outlined in the wider Protestant mission movement and in Anabaptist circles. The political context in Nigeria and the background of each partner complicated the relationship, as did differing criteria with respect to mission structures and multilateral relations. The conviction that both partners could advance their objectives through collaboration, however, was strong and sustained the relationship, despite the ambiguity of power differentials and differing opinions about priorities and approaches.¹⁰³ Today MCN is a member of Mennonite World Conference and continues to partner with MBM's successor agency, Mennonite Mission Network.

This case suggests that practitioners of partnership will face challenges on the road to fulfilling their goals of mutuality, equity, and shared ministry, indicating that their initiatives might well benefit from additional mission models. It also suggests, however, that in spite of its challenges, the partnership par-

101 Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk.

102 Umanah et al., "Presentation from Mennonite Church, Nigeria, to J. D. Graber"; Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk; O. E. Essiet and Bassey O. Udoh, "Address of Welcome to Willard Roth," August 24, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 40, Roth, Willard E.; Stanley Friesen, "A Visit to the Mennonite Churches in S. E. State by Stan and Delores Friesen and B. Charles and Grace Hostetter and Sons," May 1971, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 41, Stan and Dee Friesen; Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk.

103 For twelve years, starting in 1983, the MCN/MBM partnership was put on hold because of disagreements among the various regions that make up MCN. See documentation relating to MCN in IV-18-13-06 Box 8, IV-18-13-07 Box 4, IV-18-13-08 Box 3, and James R. Krabill to Alice Roth, December 13, 1994, Mennonite Mission Network, Elkhart, IN.

adigm provides a compelling missionary vision that can motivate and sustain collaboration among members of the world Christian movement.¹⁰⁴

104 I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Anabaptist Witness* for their insightful questions and suggestions in response to an earlier version of this article.

Enfants sacrés et subsides coloniaux chez les missionnaires des Frères mennonites

La manifestation de la séparation raciale au Congo belge, 1946-1959

ANICKA FAST¹

Mots clés : enfants de missionnaires; Congo belge; Mennonites; race; colonialisme; théorie de la performance; éducation

Résumé :

Bien que la plupart des missions protestantes au Congo belge aient été plus qu'heureuses d'accepter, en 1946, l'offre de subsides scolaires de la part de l'état colonial, la Mission américaine des Frères mennonites (AMBM – American Mennonite Brethren Mission), très attachée au principe de la séparation de l'Église et de l'État, a refusé cette offre au départ. Cependant, dans un revirement surprenant, l'AMBM change de position et accepte les subsides en 1952. À travers une étude historique, je démontre que le facteur majeur qui amène l'AMBM à accepter les subsides est la construction et l'institutionnalisation d'une identité ecclésiale séparée des Chrétiens congolais. De plus, la construction de cette identité séparée est étroitement liée à la vision qu'avaient les missionnaires d'établir une « école pour enfants blancs », séparée géographiquement de leur travail avec les Congolais. La promulgation de cette identité de Blanc contribue à ouvrir la voie à l'acceptation de subsides, à la fois en intégrant les missionnaires

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dans l'orbite de la logique coloniale de la domination, et en les amenant à prendre conscience du coût élevé de la non-conformité aux attentes de l'État. Cette étude tente d'expliquer la complexité du rôle politique des missionnaires dans un contexte colonial africain en abordant une question plus vaste : comment, en veillant aux choix politiques quotidiens – la création de groupements sociaux, le choix de termes pour désigner les autres, les modes du culte, et les discours du sacré – peut-on faire ressortir les formes de collaboration subtile qui peuvent se développer entre un état colonial et d'autres acteurs blancs à travers le jeu complexe de l'identité raciale séparée? Dans le cas de l'AMBM, le fait de porter attention aux processus subtils de la construction de l'identité permet de jeter un nouvel éclairage sur les décisions majeures des missionnaires dans le passé.

Introduction

En 1950, un petit comité de missionnaires de la Mission américaine des Frères mennonites (AMBM – American Mennonite Brethren Mission) écrit au conseil d'administration de leur mission aux États-Unis pour expliquer qu'ils ont décidé de refuser une offre de subsides du gouvernement colonial. L'administration coloniale du Congo belge avait offert des fonds à toutes les missions protestantes qui géraient des écoles primaires. En tant que Mennonites et donc, pacifistes, les missionnaires attachent une grande importance à la séparation de l'Église et de l'État. Ils écrivent :

Nous sentions définitivement qu'un principe est supposé qui lierait l'Église et l'État par une alliance contre nature. En réfléchissant sur cette question, une méditation du livre de dévotions de Spurgeon a été lue . . . qui traite de ce sujet précis en s'appuyant sur Esdras 8.22. Quant aux subsides médicaux, nous étions d'un autre avis, car en ce qui concerne l'État, ce ministère s'occupe seulement de l'aspect physique. Par contre, le ministère de l'éducation s'adresse à l'âme et à l'intelligence, auxquelles l'État s'intéresse vivement, surtout du point de vue catholique romain².

Le refus des subsides par l'AMBM constitue une forte déclaration de non-conformisme. En rejetant l'offre de subsides, ils nagent à contre-courant de plusieurs douzaines d'autres sociétés missionnaires protestantes. Ces dernières

2 Comité de l'éducation à A. E. Janzen, 2 octobre 1950, Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kliever, John B. and Ruth, 1947-49 ». Sauf mention contraire, toutes les sources principales sont en anglais et toutes les traductions sont de l'auteure. Dans Esd 8, 22 on peut lire : « J'aurais eu honte de demander au roi une escorte et des cavaliers pour nous protéger contre l'ennemi pendant la route, car nous avons dit au roi : La main de notre Dieu est pour leur bien sur tous ceux qui le cherchent, mais sa force et sa colère sont sur tous ceux qui l'abandonnent. » (Version Louis Segond).

sont plus qu'heureuses d'accepter cette offre de fonds en 1946 et de se lancer dans une énorme entreprise d'éducation pendant la décennie suivante jusqu'à l'Indépendance en 1960. Le Conseil Protestant du Congo (CPC) unit la plupart d'entre elles dans un corps consultatif comprenant un secrétaire rémunéré à temps plein. Grâce à son aide, le CPC travaillera fort pour promouvoir les intérêts des Protestants dans un contexte où l'état colonial est étroitement allié avec l'Église catholique³. Pendant que ces sociétés missionnaires protestantes s'orientent vers une attitude de collaboration avec l'état colonial, l'AMBM reste quelque peu à l'écart des missions membres du CPC et de leurs demandes de subsides. Les missionnaires de l'AMBM refusent même de devenir membres du CPC en 1947, en affirmant que l'affiliation avec un organisme si marqué par le libéralisme théologique équivaldrait à une association avec des « non-croyants⁴ ».

Cependant, dans un revirement surprenant, l'AMBM ne maintiendra pas longtemps son refus de subsides. Dès 1952, après plusieurs années de tensions et de votes divisés à ce sujet, les missionnaires acceptent enfin les fonds et s'engagent dans une nouvelle phase de construction et d'expansion qui sera d'une portée majeure pour l'avenir de l'Église naissante des Frères mennonites congolais⁵. Cette étude tente d'expliquer comment les missionnaires de l'AMBM, malgré leur dévouement au principe de la séparation de l'Église et de l'État, ont pu se réorienter vers une collaboration avec l'état colonial beaucoup plus étroite que celle qu'ils avaient pu envisager au départ. Mes recherches démontrent que ce changement de politique devient imaginable pour les missionnaires à cause des décisions et des actions quotidiennes à travers lesquelles ils manifestent ou construisent leur identité de Blancs dans un contexte colonial lors d'une phase cruciale de transition et de consolidation de la Mission. Entre 1946 et 1952, les missionnaires de l'AMBM créeront et institutionnaliseront des structures qui renforceront la séparation ecclésiale et raciale entre les chrétiens expatriés et congolais. Ensuite, leur attachement à l'éducation ségréguée de leurs enfants – comme à un idéal sacré – jouera un rôle décisif en les amenant à surmonter leur

3 Cecilia Irvine, *The Church of Christ in Zaïre: A Handbook of Protestant Churches, Missions, and Communities, 1878-1978*, Indianapolis, Dept. of Africa, Division of Overseas Ministries, Christian Church Disciples of Christ, 1978, p. xviii.

4 Procès-verbal, Africa Missionary Council, 2-4 janvier 1947, Kafumba. Archives de la MB Mission A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1946-1948 ».

5 J. B Toews et Paul G. Hiebert, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, Fresno; Hillsboro, Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978, p. 106; Erik Kumedisa, « Mennonite Churches in Central Africa », dans John Allen Lapp et C. Arnold Snyder, dir., *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts: Global Mennonite History Series: Africa*, Intercourse, PA/Kitchener, ON, Good Books/Pandora Press, 2006, p. 63-64.

opposition aux subsides scolaires coloniaux. L'exemple de l'AMBM met donc en lumière une question plus vaste : comment, en faisant attention aux choix politiques quotidiens – la création de groupements sociaux, le choix de termes pour désigner les autres, les modes du culte, et les discours du sacré – peut-on faire ressortir les formes de collaboration subtile qui peuvent se développer entre un état colonial et d'autres acteurs blancs à travers le jeu complexe de l'identité raciale séparée?

Cette recherche se base premièrement sur les archives de l'AMBM à Fresno en Californie (États-Unis). La Mission a subi plusieurs changements de nom et s'appelle aujourd'hui MB Mission. Je remercie sincèrement la Commission historique des Frères Mennonites (« MB Historical Commission »), qui a défrayé le coût de mon voyage aux archives en juin 2016.

Orientations théoriques : Les missionnaires et l'administration coloniale indirecte

Bien avant qu'Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. ait notoirement accusé les missionnaires d'impérialisme culturel⁶, les chercheurs ont débattu de la relation complexe entre les missionnaires et l'état colonial. D'un côté, il est clair que l'introduction du christianisme en Afrique aux XIXe et XXe siècles ait été animée à certains égards par une « logique de conquête⁷ ». De l'autre côté, les missionnaires concevaient leur mission première comme étant celle de l'évangélisation et de l'implantation d'églises. Bien qu'ils aient parfois joué un rôle dans le soutien et la légitimation de la domination coloniale, ils ne voyaient pas cela comme faisant explicitement partie de leur mandat.⁸ Cette section présente les pré-supposés et les méthodes qui sous-tendent la présente recherche et qui permettent de comprendre la complexité du rôle politique des missionnaires dans un contexte colonial africain.

Premièrement, j'adopte une définition très large du politique, en suivant Harold Lasswell. En appréhendant le politique comme étant la lutte pour déterminer « qui a quoi, quand et comment⁹ », il est possible de comprendre tout groupe religieux organisé comme étant intrinsèquement politique, même

6 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., « The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism », dans John King Fairbank, dir., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 363-64.

7 Achille Mbembe, *Afriques indociles: Christianisme, pouvoir et État en société postcoloniale*, Paris, Karthala, 1988, p. 40, Collection « Chrétiens en liberté ».

8 Karen E. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 101.

9 Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*, New York, P. Smith, 1950. Sauf mention contraire, toutes les traductions sont de l'auteur.

quand il n'entretient pas de relations directes avec l'État¹⁰. Une telle perspective éclairera les effets politiques concrets des activités et discours « religieux » des missionnaires.

Deuxièmement, je m'inspire du travail de la sociologue Karen Fields pour explorer comment les missionnaires qui travaillaient en contexte colonial pouvaient participer de façon subtile à la logique de la colonisation, même quand ils rejetaient, en principe, toute collaboration avec le régime¹¹. Fields a examiné comment les puissances européennes pouvaient rendre effective leur gouvernance de vastes territoires africains, étant donné la présence éparse des agents coloniaux. À travers une étude détaillée de plusieurs contextes de l'Afrique centrale au début du XX^e siècle, elle soutient que tous les Blancs dans la colonie, y compris les missionnaires, contribuaient à la légitimation de l'ordre colonial dans la mesure où ils acceptaient et promulguaient tacitement les « lois non écrites de l'ordre colonial – ses codes sociaux¹² ». En adoptant un comportement acceptable de « Blancs », ils pouvaient « porter les armes et le drapeau de l'État . . . par le simple fait d'arborer la peau blanche¹³ ». De cette façon, ils soutenaient de façon subtile « la logique de la domination » et se faisaient ainsi « colonisateurs », eux aussi¹⁴. Je porterai une attention particulière aux façons qu'avaient les missionnaires de se prévaloir de leur identité de Blancs par leur promulgation des codes sociaux du régime colonial.

Troisièmement, j'adopte des perspectives méthodologiques tirées de la théorie de la performance et de la théologie politique. Ces perspectives mettent l'accent sur la puissance politique des gestes quotidiens qui peuvent sembler banals, mais qui servent à construire l'identité sociale des missionnaires. Yolanda Covington-Ward, spécialiste dans la théorie de la performance, souligne qu'il est possible d'acquérir des connaissances essentielles sur le pouvoir et l'autorité « en prêtant attention à ce que les gens font avec et à travers leurs corps dans la vie quotidienne¹⁵ ». Des théologiens politiques, tels que William T. Cavanaugh, soulignent l'importance des pratiques incarnées comme étant des « liturgies » par lesquelles les organismes religieux démontrent à la fois leur réalité politique et entrent en compétition avec les liturgies alternatives promulguées par l'État

10 Timothy Paul Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 313. Collection « African Studies Series ».

11 Fields, *Revival and Rebellion*, p. 50.

12 Ibid., p. 33, 49.

13 Ibid., p. 49.

14 Ibid., p. 50.

15 Yolanda Covington-Ward, *Gesture and Power: Religion, Nationalism, and Everyday Performance in Congo*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 10. Collection « Religious Cultures of African and African Diaspora People ».

ou par d'autres acteurs politiques¹⁶. Tout au long de cette étude, je porte une attention particulière aux pratiques concrètes des missionnaires – l'alimentation, le travail, le culte, la prise de décisions – en suivant les indices souvent indirects trouvés dans les comptes rendus, la correspondance et les rapports.

Quatrièmement, je puise dans la pensée du sociologue de la religion, Christian Smith, pour mieux comprendre comment les gens créent des récits pour conférer un sens à leurs vies¹⁷. Selon Smith, les pratiques spécifiques des gens aident à créer des récits qui, ensuite, englobent et définissent leurs vies de plus en plus. L'examen de ces récits clés est utile pour identifier ce qui est sacré ou intouchable dans un ordre social donné¹⁸. Dans le cas de l'AMBM, je démontrerai que l'éducation des enfants des missionnaires est devenue un idéal sacré qui pouvait renforcer ou miner d'autres récits à l'intérieur de l'univers social des missionnaires.

Finalement, et de façon plus générale, cette étude s'inscrit dans la ligne de pensée de l'historien Richard Elphick, qui appelle les historiens à examiner de plus près les liens entre les idées, les personnes et les institutions missionnaires clés au cours du XXe siècle¹⁹. Comme le démontre l'étude d'Elphick sur l'idéal de l'égalité raciale en Afrique du Sud, les missionnaires peuvent jouer un rôle significatif dans l'histoire en promulguant et en institutionnalisant des idées qui ont des répercussions politiques majeures. Cette étude de l'AMBM se veut donc une étude de cas sur la manière dont la séparation raciale peut être incorporée dans les institutions à travers le temps, en passant par les pratiques quotidiennes des personnes, jusqu'au point où la collaboration explicite avec un gouvernement colonial devient concevable à ceux qui, auparavant, avaient exprimé en termes théologiques leur forte opposition à un tel pas.

La manifestation de la séparation pendant la consolidation du travail de l'AMBM au Congo belge

Les réflexions initiales des missionnaires de l'AMBM par rapport aux subsides se déroulent dans un contexte de consolidation et d'expansion pendant la période suivant immédiatement la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Pour toutes les

16 William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, Collection « Challenges in Contemporary Theology »; Voir aussi John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, Scottdale, Herald Press, 2001.

17 Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 78, 80.

18 Ibid., p. 77.

19 Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 8. Collection « Challenges in Contemporary Theology ».

missions protestantes au Congo, une nouvelle ère vient de commencer. La dépression et la guerre sont finies, les missionnaires et les agents de l'État peuvent de nouveau circuler librement entre l'Afrique et l'Europe, et le gouvernement colonial a accepté enfin d'offrir aux Protestants les mêmes subsides scolaires dont bénéficient les écoles des missions catholiques depuis 1924²⁰. Bien que les missionnaires de l'AMBM aient rejeté d'emblée les subsides, ils sont transportés par la même vague d'expansion. Leur conseil d'administration, situé au siège de la Mission aux États-Unis, accepte enfin de prendre la responsabilité officielle du travail missionnaire au Congo en 1943. Bien qu'une poignée de missionnaires pionniers aient œuvré au Congo depuis 1922, soutenus en partie par les églises nord-américaines et en partie par des activités d'autofinancement, l'adoption officielle du travail au Congo permet maintenant l'expansion rapide des efforts des missionnaires. De nouveaux missionnaires affluent par les canaux de recrutement réguliers du Conseil d'administration. De 1945 à 1946 uniquement, le nombre des missionnaires de l'AMBM fait plus que doubler, de cinq à treize. Ce nombre doublera presque encore deux fois avant l'Indépendance²¹.

Au cours des années suivantes, l'énergie de ce groupe élargi de missionnaires est dirigée vers plusieurs tâches majeures. Celles-ci comprennent, premièrement, la création de nouvelles structures de gouvernance et de prises de décisions plus appropriées pour un corps missionnaire grandissant; deuxièmement, l'adoption de nouvelles politiques qui mettent fin à la pratique d'adopter ou d'élever des orphelins congolais dans les familles des missionnaires; et troisièmement, une augmentation significative des activités de construction sur les stations missionnaires, de façon à amener les missionnaires à jouer beaucoup plus souvent le rôle de superviseur et de gestionnaire des affaires complexes de la station. Dans des recherches antérieures, j'ai examiné ces développements pour démontrer comment ils menaient à une institutionnalisation de pratiques et de modes d'interaction qui tendaient à établir une séparation accrue entre les missionnaires et les chrétiens congolais, tant au niveau social qu'ecclésial²². Bien que cette séparation ne soit pas forcément exprimée en termes raciaux – elle revêt aussi un caractère culturel – le fait que tous les missionnaires soient

20 Marvin D. Markowitz, *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1973, p. 55-58.

21 Procès-verbal, Africa Field Council, 26 juil. au 2 août 1959. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1959-1963 ».

22 Anicka Fast, *Enacting Whiteness: Colonial Subsidies, Missionary Kids, and the Performance of Racial Separation through Missionary Politics in Belgian Congo, 1947-1953*. [Travail de fin de session pour le cours « Problems and Issues of Contemporary Africa: Religion and Politics ». Université Boston, 16 décembre 2016].

blancs implique que cette séparation s'aligne quand même avec l'origine ethnique.

La présente étude est centrée sur les deux autres tâches majeures entreprises par les missionnaires pendant cette période : la scolarisation de leurs propres enfants et le choix des modalités d'éducation à offrir aux enfants congolais à travers les écoles gérées par la Mission. Pendant la période de consolidation, de 1946 à 1952, ces deux tâches entrent en conflit et se renforcent chacune de leur côté, avec comme résultat un accroissement de la séparation raciale et ecclésiale entre les missionnaires expatriés et les chrétiens congolais.

L'école pour les enfants des missionnaires : l'« école pour enfants blancs »

Lorsque les enfants des missionnaires de l'AMBM commencent à atteindre l'âge scolaire, leurs parents font face à un dilemme. D'un côté, ils croient devoir faire des sacrifices en ce qui concerne leur style de vie afin de pouvoir accomplir leur mission au Congo. Mais de l'autre côté, leur sens du devoir les pousse à vouloir offrir à leurs enfants une scolarité de bonne qualité; ils expriment donc le sentiment que leurs enfants ne devraient pas avoir à faire les mêmes sacrifices que leurs parents. Comme le dit un des missionnaires : « Le Seigneur nous a confié nos enfants afin que nous les formions pour Sa gloire, même si nous sommes en terre païenne²³ ». Les missionnaires choisissent de résoudre cette tension à travers une stratégie de séparation géographique. Le projet d'école, surnommé alternativement dans les comptes rendus officiels, « l'école pour les enfants des missionnaires » et « l'école pour les enfants blancs », devient une arène où les missionnaires se prévalent fortement de leur identité séparée de « Blanc ».

Quand la proposition d'une école pour les enfants des missionnaires est introduite en 1949 lors de l'assemblée générale des missionnaires sur le terrain (« Field council »), elle est formulée en termes d'un besoin de séparation géographique et culturelle entre, d'une part, l'école des enfants des missionnaires, et d'autre part, le travail missionnaire d'évangélisation, d'implantation d'églises et de scolarisation des enfants congolais dans les stations. Dans le discours des missionnaires, cette séparation est liée à la fois à l'influence supposément malsaine du milieu environnant et à l'appel ou au destin spécial des enfants de missionnaires. Le projet l'exprime comme suit :

Nous sommes profondément conscients de l'impression non spirituelle et tragique que laisse l'influence d'un environnement méchant sur nos chers enfants. Cela a rendu urgent le besoin d'une école séparée, dans un endroit où il ne se fait pas d'autre travail de ce genre. Ce sont des enfants qui

23 Frank Buschmann à A.E. Janzen, 30 juin 1949. Archives de la MB Mission A250-10-2, Boîte 2, Dossier : « Buschmann, Frank and Clara, 1949-1950 ».

sont appelés et choisis par le Seigneur pour rendre de grands services à l'avenir²⁴.

Le secrétaire du conseil d'administration de l'AMBM, monsieur A.E. Janzen, exprime son accord avec ce point de vue lors de sa visite au Congo en mars 1949²⁵. Selon lui, l'école doit idéalement être située quelque part sur le grand terrain confié à la Mission, mais dans une parcelle séparée, là où il ne se fait pas d'autre « travail avec les indigènes²⁶ ». Bien que M. Janzen n'explique pas en détail son raisonnement, on peut déduire son désir d'éviter une juxtaposition trop évidente entre les conditions de scolarisation des enfants des missionnaires et celles des enfants congolais. Un autre missionnaire exprime aussi cette idée que les enfants des missionnaires doivent être protégés de l'influence polluante de la culture congolaise. J. C. Ratzlaff est un ardent défenseur du projet d'école dès son arrivée en 1948, et il la dirigera éventuellement avec sa femme, Edna. En 1950, il insiste sur l'urgente nécessité de situer l'école dans un endroit séparé des autres stations missionnaires, afin d'empêcher le développement d'une intimité inappropriée entre les enfants des missionnaires et les enfants congolais. « Les enfants sont dans le besoin maintenant », écrit-il, « et si nous devons les aider, cela doit se faire maintenant. Nous avons vu des enfants grandir trop semblablement aux indigènes à cause du manque d'une école²⁷ ».

Étant donné cette vision, cela semble providentiel aux missionnaires quand une parcelle de terrain très intéressante devient disponible à Kajiji, à environ 500 km au sud de la station principale de Kafumba. Cette belle propriété se trouve à une altitude élevée dans une région montagneuse près de la frontière

24 Wm. G. Baerg pour « Das Komitee ». « Recommendation », p. 2. Octobre 1948. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « Education, general & misc, 1948-1966 ». Ma traduction de l'allemand. L'original dit : « Wir erkennen es tief und sehen den ungeistlichen und tragischen Eindruck, den der Einfluss der suendhaften Umgebung auf unsere liebe Kinder macht, welches es beschleunigt eine abgesonderte Schule zu haben wo keine andere Arbeit in derweise getan wird. Es gibt um Kinder die der Herr fuer weitere grosse Dienste beruft und gerufen wird. » La référence à « andere Arbeit in derweise [sic] » semble se rapporter au travail de mise au pied d'une école pour enfants de missionnaires. Selon ma lecture du contexte, je crois qu'il est possible qu'il s'agit d'une référence au travail missionnaire plus large auprès des Congolais.

25 Ce secrétaire représentait le siège de la mission AMBM aux États-Unis.

26 A.E. Janzen, *Survey of Five of the Mission Fields of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America Located in India, Africa, Brazil, Paraguay and Colombia, Made by A.E. Janzen, Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the Board of Foreign Missions during December 1948 to June 10, 1949*, s.d., [1950 (?)], p. 64 [manuscrit inédit, Archives de la MB Mission].

27 J.C. Ratzlaff à A.E. Janzen, août 1950. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 5, Dossier : « Ratzlaff, John C. and Edna, 1948-1955 ».

avec l'Angola. Le climat y est beaucoup plus frais et plaisant en comparaison avec celui qui prévaut sur les autres stations de l'AMBM. À cause du sol fertile et du climat frais, on envisage des légumes frais en abondance et la possibilité d'élever du bétail bovin pour avoir du lait et de la viande. Comme le site avait fonctionné dans le passé comme centre expérimental de sériculture (élevage du ver à soie) géré par l'Institut Smithsonian, des bâtiments en pierre se trouvent déjà sur place, ainsi que de l'équipement pour permettre l'électrification de la propriété et son approvisionnement en eau courante²⁸. À part Kafumba, où l'on cultive des fruits et des légumes, aucune des stations existantes de l'AMBM n'a accès à ces luxes.

La réaction initiale du conseil d'administration de la Mission aux États-Unis, en 1949, est de refuser catégoriquement d'acheter Kajiji à cause de son emplacement lointain et de son prix élevé.²⁹ Cependant, l'idée de Kajiji ne disparaît pas. Les missionnaires font la promotion de cet achat avec insistance, en dépit des objections du conseil d'administration. La possibilité de cet achat revient sur la table à de nombreuses autres reprises et est empêchée, soit par les circonstances, soit par l'intervention directe du conseil d'administration. Tout au long du processus, le secrétaire du conseil d'administration, M. A.E. Janzen, prône la prudence et la sagesse au sujet de l'achat possible de Kajiji, et essaie constamment de brider ou de calmer l'enthousiasme des missionnaires. Il faut un discernement prudent, insiste-t-il, car « l'emplacement de cette école aura de conséquences d'une grande portée³⁰ ». Pourtant, les missionnaires continuent d'affirmer vigoureusement leur désir d'acheter cette propriété afin d'y mettre sur pied une école pour leurs enfants et de s'en servir comme lieu de retraite ou de vacances pour les missionnaires. En tenant pour équivalentes les conditions de scolarisation de leurs enfants et leur propre lieu de vacances idéal, les missionnaires envoient un message clair sur le niveau de vie auquel ils aspirent pour leurs enfants, ce qui accuse un contraste avec ce qu'ils considèrent comme étant approprié pour des enfants congolais, ou pour leurs propres conditions de travail en tant qu'adultes. Ils expriment leurs sentiments par le moyen de lettres, par des votes lors des assemblées générales des missionnaires, et même par une pétition au début de 1950, signée par 18 des 22 missionnaires en faveur de l'acquisition de Kajiji³¹. Le missionnaire A.F. Kroeker insiste sur le fait que les

28 Toews et Hiebert, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, p. 89-90.

29 Télégramme de A.F. Kroeker à A.E. Janzen, 19 décembre 1949, et réponse, 23 décembre 1949. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 5, Dossier : « Kroeker, A.F. and Mary, 1942-1949 ».

30 A.E. Janzen à J.C. Ratzlaff, December 8, 1949. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 5, Dossier : « Ratzlaff, John C. and Edna, 1948-1955 ».

31 « Concerning Kajiji or other possible sites for the school for missionaries' children », [début 1950]. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « Edu-

missionnaires sont plus unis autour de cette question qu'ils ne l'ont été sur tout autre projet depuis le début de la mission au Congo – une affirmation quelque peu malhonnête étant donné le désaccord exprimé par quatre des missionnaires les plus âgés et ayant servi le plus longtemps³².

Enfin, au début de 1951, les circonstances rendent possible l'achat de Kajiji. Le prix baisse et les missionnaires catholiques commencent à manifester leur intérêt pour le site. Ce sont ces deux facteurs qui semblent enfin convaincre le conseil d'administration de permettre l'achat³³. La première session à la nouvelle école, baptisée l'École Belle Vue, débute à l'automne de la même année.

Après l'acquisition de Kajiji, les missionnaires continuent de faire valoir le destin particulier de leurs enfants et de promulguer leur séparation en termes ecclésiaux et raciaux. La littérature faisant la promotion de l'école met en relief la beauté de l'environnement naturel. Parmi les attraits principaux de l'école, on énumère le climat frais avec « peu de moustiques », « le système d'eau courante » et « le jardin productif ». On réfère également aux « visages blancs contents » des enfants pour indiquer leur identité d'enfants de missionnaires³⁴. Il est intéressant de noter qu'environ une année plus tard, l'AMBM acquiert la station missionnaire de Kajiji d'une autre mission, la Unevangelized Tribes Mission (UTM). La station de Kajiji est avoisinante au terrain qui abrite l'école Belle Vue. Maintenant, l'école se trouve donc à proximité d'une grande église de quelques 500 membres congolais baptisés, qui tient ses célébrations à quelques dix minutes de marche³⁵. Cependant, les enfants des missionnaires continuent à tenir leur culte séparé le dimanche matin dans leur propre chapelle, construite expressément à cette fin par les enseignants³⁶. Ils accueillent les missionnaires de la station Kajiji pour un autre culte le dimanche soir et commencent à utiliser du matériel d'école du dimanche « commandé des États-Unis » à partir

cation, General and Misc, 1967-1987 » (mal classé).

32 A.F. Kroeker à A.E. Janzen, 19 janvier 1950. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kroeker, A. F. and Mary, 1950-51 ».

33 Clyde A. Shannon à J.C. Ratzlaff et A.F. Kroeker, January 27, 1951. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 5, Dossier : « Kroeker, A.F. and Mary, 1950-1951 ».

34 Brochure promotionnelle produite conjointement par le Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions (jadis l'AMBM) et la Congo Inland Mission, s.d. [vers la fin des années 1950]. Archives de la MB Mission, A-250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « École Belle Vue, 1952-1968 ».

35 Toews et Hiebert, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire*, p. 93.

36 J.C. Ratzlaff à J.B. Toews, 24 août 1955. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 5, Dossier : « Ratzlaff, John C. and Edna, 1948-1955 ».

de 1958³⁷. En faisant référence à cette chapelle dans une lettre, un des missionnaires la désigne comme une « vraie église qui devrait être plus propice à l'adoration » pour les enfants³⁸.

Ce n'est qu'en 1957 que le secrétaire du conseil d'administration de la Congo Inland Mission (CIM), mission qui gère conjointement l'école Belle Vue avec l'AMBM depuis 1953, exprime sa préoccupation au sujet du caractère ségrégué de l'école³⁹. Étant donné l'imminence de l'Indépendance et l'ouverture de plusieurs écoles secondaires pour les élèves congolais, il suggère qu'il pourrait être plus approprié pour les enfants des missionnaires de s'intégrer dans les écoles locales⁴⁰. Il remarque que deux autres sociétés missionnaires – les Baptistes américains et la « Unevangelized Fields Mission » avaient déjà emprunté cette voie. Cependant, les parents de l'AMBM et de la CIM rejettent cette proposition et poursuivent l'expansion de l'École Belle Vue en ajoutant un programme de niveau secondaire de quatre ans⁴¹. Au bout du compte, peu d'élèves fréquenteront le programme secondaire, puisque l'École Belle Vue sera fermée définitivement suite aux bouleversements politiques reliés à l'avènement de l'Indépendance en 1960⁴².

Dans la présente section, j'ai démontré que le motif de l'acquisition du terrain destiné à l'École Belle Vue est relié au désir profond qu'ont les missionnaires à cette époque d'offrir à leurs enfants une éducation de haute qualité, afin de les compenser pour le sacrifice qu'ils croient être en train de faire. En situant l'école dans un endroit comme Kajiji, les missionnaires espèrent protéger leurs enfants des désagréments de la vie en terre de mission, leur assurer de bonnes perspectives d'éducation dans l'avenir, et leur offrir une éducation à

37 Sawatzky, Walter et Irma. 1959. « Annual report of the Belle Vue Missionary Children's School », p. 4. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « École Belle Vue, 1952-1968 ».

38 J.C. Ratzlaff à J.B. Toews, 24 août 1955. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 5, Dossier : « Ratzlaff, John C. and Edna, 1948-1955 ».

39 Bien que Belle Vue soit au départ une initiative de l'AMBM, elle s'étend bientôt pour devenir un projet de collaboration entre l'AMBM et une autre mission mennonite, la « Congo Inland Mission » (CIM). Les deux missions sont représentées au conseil d'administration de l'école, formé en 1953. « History of Ecole Belle Vue », p. 3. Archives de la MB Mission A250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « École Belle Vue, 1952-1968 ».

40 Harve Driver à J.B. Toews, 7 octobre 1957. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « École Belle Vue, 1952-1968 ».

41 « Minutes of the meeting of representatives of C.I.M. and A.M.B.M. concerning the future of Ecole Belle Vue, held in Kansas City, Missouri, May 28, 1958 ». Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « École Belle Vue, 1952-1968 ».

42 « History of Ecole Belle Vue », p. 3-4. Archives de la MB Mission A250-10-3, Boîte 6, Dossier : « École Belle Vue, 1952-1968 ».

caractère chrétien qui puisse les amener à développer un fort engagement personnel dans la foi et à considérer éventuellement un service missionnaire à leur tour. Lorsqu'ils font référence à l'école, les missionnaires utilisent un discours empreint d'un langage racial et d'une volonté de protéger à tout prix le destin spécial des enfants blancs de missionnaires. Le ton de la discussion au sujet de l'école révèle la manière dont les enfants des missionnaires ont été mis à part, dans l'esprit des missionnaires, comme s'ils étaient sacrés ou inviolables. De plus, le caractère sacré dont est revêtue l'école s'étend à l'identité chrétienne des enfants, les séparant de leurs coreligionnaires qui se trouvent à distance de marche.

Les subsides scolaires

L'autre préoccupation majeure des missionnaires pendant cette période est de décider s'il faut ou non accepter l'offre de subsides scolaires de la part du gouvernement colonial, destinés aux écoles gérées par la Mission à l'intention des Congolais. Lorsque les missionnaires décident d'accepter ces subsides, la dynamique de la séparation raciale, de plus en plus ancrée et symbolisée par l'école pour enfants blancs, se déploie d'une façon qui mène à des conséquences politiques concrètes et profondes.

Le rejet initial des subsides par les missionnaires de l'AMBM en 1948 apparaît simple; les missionnaires ne justifient pas leur refus⁴³. Mais au moment de l'assemblée générale des missionnaires sur le terrain de 1949, la discussion devient contentieuse et mène à l'égalité des voix dans un vote, tranché en faveur du « non » par le président du comité⁴⁴. Bien que le conseil d'administration en Amérique du Nord leur demande de revoir leur décision, il respecte leur conclusion que les subsides lieraient « l'Église et l'État par une alliance contre nature⁴⁵ ». En 1950 et 1951, les missionnaires et le conseil d'administration se remettent graduellement à considérer la possibilité d'accepter les subsides. En 1951, l'assemblée des missionnaires exprime son ouverture à la possibilité de subsides « si cela est nécessaire, et si le conseil d'administration ne considère pas cela comme étant une violation des principes scripturaux⁴⁶ ». Néanmoins, jusqu'en début de 1952, la correspondance entre les missionnaires et le secrétaire

43 Procès-verbal, Assemblée générale sur le terrain (« Field Council »), 1^{er} au 3 juillet 1948, Matende. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1946-1948 ».

44 À l'époque, c'était I.L. Friesen.

45 Comité de l'éducation à A. E. Janzen, 2 octobre 1950, Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kliewer, John B. and Ruth, 1947-49 ».

46 Procès-Verbal, Assemblée générale sur le terrain (« Field Council »), 25 au 27 juin 1951, Kafumba. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1949-1954 ».

du conseil d'administration démontre que plusieurs espèrent encore trouver une façon d'offrir aux Congolais des écoles reconnues par l'État, sans forcément accepter des fonds de celui-ci, du moins pour la plupart des écoles.⁴⁷

Il est clair que plusieurs facteurs contribuent au changement d'attitude des missionnaires au sujet des subsides. Un des plus significatifs est sans doute la rivalité entre les missionnaires catholiques et protestants, qui joue un rôle important dans le paysage religieux du Congo belge. Les missionnaires de l'AMBM s'inquiètent souvent à l'idée que des missionnaires catholiques, qu'ils considèrent comme n'étant absolument pas chrétiens, puissent venir « englober » leur travail s'ils n'occupent pas pleinement leurs territoires⁴⁸. Néanmoins, en dépit d'une réelle crainte d'empiétement par les catholiques, ce n'est pas de là que vient la décision soudaine d'accepter les subsides. Le revirement de la situation vient au moment où la question des subsides scolaires se heurte fortement au parcours de l'école pour enfants de missionnaires au début de 1952.

Pendant que les enfants des missionnaires et leurs enseignants, tout heureux, s'établissent dans leur nouvelle école à Belle Vue à la fin de 1951, une difficulté se dessine autour d'une question non résolue de titre foncier. L'accord d'achat de la propriété, conclu plus tôt cette année, s'applique seulement aux bâtiments, mais l'approbation du titre foncier par l'État est nécessaire avant de pouvoir finaliser l'achat. Le fait d'avoir à attendre avant de recevoir le titre foncier ne cause pas de souci excessif chez les missionnaires au départ. Bien sûr, étant donné que les enfants se trouvent déjà sur place, que les réunions du comité administratif se tiennent là, qu'on envisage d'apporter des améliorations aux bâtiments, et qu'on planifie d'y tenir en juin 1952 la prochaine assemblée générale des missionnaires, ils espèrent recevoir ce titre rapidement. Le vendeur de la propriété commence aussi à s'inquiéter du délai vers le mois de mars 1952.⁴⁹ Toutefois, au mois de mai, la situation prend une tournure dramatique.

Le 1^{er} mai, l'AMBM reçoit une lettre du gouverneur de la province, qui refuse la demande de titre foncier de la Mission, au motif que l'AMBM a refusé les subsides de l'État pour leurs écoles. « Principalement, » écrit le gouverneur, « la Mission n'ayant pas signé la Convention dans l'intérêt scolastique des indigènes, il convient qu'avant de s'engager dans l'enseignement des enfants

47 A.E. Janzen à Henry Brucks, 31 janvier 1952. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-5, Boîte 11, Dossier : « Oversize records ». Voir aussi A.E. Janzen à J.B. Kliever, 21 mai 1951, et J.B. Kliever à A.E. Janzen, 29 mai 1951. A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kliever, John B. and Ruth, 1951-52 ».

48 Plusieurs missionnaires s'expriment en ces termes. Pour avoir un exemple, lire A.F. Kroeker à tous les missionnaires, 25 septembre 1949. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 5, Dossier : « Kroeker, A.F. and Mary, 1942-1949 ».

49 J.B. Kliever à A.E. Janzen, 29 mars 1952 et 23 avril 1952. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kliever, John B. and Ruth, 1951-1952 ».

blancs, la Mission prouve sa capacité d'enseigner aux indigènes⁵⁰ ». Cette réponse plonge les missionnaires dans le désarroi et les amène immédiatement à reconsidérer la signature de la convention sur les subsides. Leurs préoccupations au sujet des subsides, énoncées précédemment, semblent disparaître du jour au lendemain. J.B. Kliever, le représentant légal de la Mission, écrit la nouvelle à tous ses collègues missionnaires :

Il semble que c'est un des premiers problèmes auquel nous faisons face à cause de notre refus d'accepter les subsides du gouvernement dans nos écoles . . . Comme on peut voir dans la lettre ci-jointe, nous ne pouvons pas espérer avoir Kajiji. Cependant, « À L'ÉTERNEL LA TERRE ET CE QU'ELLE RENFERME ». C'est par la foi que nous avons fait les négociations pour Kajiji et le déménagement à Kajiji, en croyant que Dieu nous donnerait le lieu et que c'était le lieu de Son choix pour l'école. IL EST CAPABLE encore maintenant. Comment? Il le sait . . . et 'IL L'ACCOMPLIRA' si c'est Sa volonté⁵¹.

En résistant aux subsides, les missionnaires de l'AMBM découvrent le genre de pression que pouvait exercer l'État pour les encourager à se soumettre à ses buts. Toutefois, à cause de leur ardent désir d'acquérir la propriété à Kajiji, les missionnaires ne sont pas disposés à résister longtemps à cette pression. Après que Kajiji eut été menacé, la volte-face en rapport avec les subsides s'est opérée rapidement. En compagnie du Révérend J. B. Toews, représentant du conseil d'administration en visite au Congo, quelques missionnaires se rendent immédiatement à Léopoldville pour s'entretenir avec les fonctionnaires concernés. Ils reçoivent aussi la confirmation que le refus continu des subsides menacera leurs chances d'avoir une réponse favorable à leur demande du titre foncier. M. Toews l'exprime en ces termes : « [L]a réaction du gouvernement face aux Missions qui n'accéderont pas à sa requête sera la non-coopération, comme nous la vivons dorénavant avec le refus de notre demande d'acquisition de la propriété à Kajiji⁵² ». De plus, le ministre de l'éducation indique clairement que la non-conformité au projet éducatif de l'État entraînera un manque de reconnaissance du travail de la Mission. Selon Toews, le ministre aurait dit ceci : « Nous ne

50 Traduction de la lettre du gouverneur de la Province au représentant légal de l'AMBM, 18 mars 1952, par J.B. Kliever, 1^{er} mai 1952. L'original français ne se trouve pas dans les archives. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kliever, John B. and Ruth, 1951-1952 ».

51 J.B. Kliever aux collègues missionnaires sur toutes les stations de l'AMBM, 1^{er} mai 1952. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kliever, John B. and Ruth, 1951-1952 ».

52 J.B. Toews, « Report 6. J.B. Toews' Administrative Visit to Belgian Congo », p. 5. 1956. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Field visit reports, 1952-1988 ».

forçons aucune mission à accepter notre programme. Cependant, nous ne pouvons reconnaître aucun travail des missions qui ne s'y conforment pas⁵³ ». Bien que la question du titre foncier n'ait pas été réglée complètement avant 1955, les missionnaires de l'AMBM reçoivent l'assurance qu'en promettant de signer la Convention, ils seront de nouveau dans les bonnes grâces de l'État et que leur demande du titre foncier sera reconsidérée⁵⁴. Au cours des mois suivants, ils finissent bientôt par accepter les subsides, et l'approbation finale du conseil d'administration en octobre 1952 est presque purement formelle⁵⁵.

Pendant leur assemblée générale à Kajiji en juin 1952, les missionnaires trouvent des façons de justifier leur changement de politique en déclarant celle-ci tout de même cohérente avec la séparation de l'Église et de l'État. En tant que théologien très instruit et pasteur respecté, l'invité J.B. Toews joue un rôle majeur dans ce processus de recadrage et aide les missionnaires à surmonter leur réticence⁵⁶. Le procès-verbal de l'assemblée relate la discussion suivante à propos de la « question éducative », qui apparaît comme premier point à l'ordre du jour :

[Toews] a présenté l'histoire et le développement du programme scolaire pour le Congo, du côté du Gouvernement, la relation de la Mission à la question d'un programme subventionné, et le pour et le contre de l'affiliation à un tel programme. Il a dit que nous devons maintenant décider quelle voie nous voulons prendre. Il a conclu ses observations en déclarant qu'il ne voyait pas de danger dans un tel programme scolaire en soi, mais plutôt dans la relation entre un tel programme scolaire et l'Église indigène, à moins que nous trouvions une façon de prendre des dispositions appropriées.

Suite à la pertinente présentation sur ce sujet, le président a remarqué que nous devons en premier lieu déterminer si nous pouvons trouver une façon d'accepter la Convention du gouvernement pour nous écoles⁵⁷.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid, p. 5-6.

55 A.E. Janzen à J.B. Kliwer, 18 octobre 1952. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-2, Boîte 4, Dossier : « Kliwer, John B. and Ruth, 1951-1952 ».

56 Dans une entrevue de 2016, Robert Kroeker, un missionnaire arrivé au Congo peu après ces événements, exprime la perception que Toews « détenait l'autorité » par rapport à cette question. Entretien entre Bob Kroeker, Ruth Kliwer et Anicka Fast, à Reedley en Californie, le 30 juin 2016.

57 Procès-verbal, Assemblée générale sur le terrain (« Field Council »), 24 au 28 juin 1952, Belle Vue. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1949-1954 ».

En reformulant le problème comme étant celui de la façon d'accepter les subsides sans porter atteinte à la séparation de l'Église et de l'État, Toews aide à redéfinir les rôles respectifs de la Mission, de l'Église, et de l'école. En amenant les missionnaires à concentrer leur attention sur la relation entre l'école et l'Église, la présentation de Toews donne une importance secondaire à la question de la relation entre la Mission et l'État. Dans une résolution adoptée le lendemain, les missionnaires affirment que « l'École, construite selon le plan de l'État, doit demeurer une institution séparée et non pas une partie de l'Église⁵⁸ ». Même si cette affirmation leur permet de conserver le sentiment de ne pas avoir abandonné complètement leur précieux « principe fondamental de la séparation de l'Église et de l'État », elle signifie essentiellement que le fardeau de la propriété et de la gestion des écoles incombera à la Mission⁵⁹. Dans ce discours des missionnaires, le concept de « l'Église » s'applique aux croyants congolais seulement. De cette façon, la Mission est dispensée de l'obligation de rester dissociée de l'État. En légitimant l'acceptation des subsides au motif que la Mission n'est pas l'Église, les missionnaires redéfinissent leur mandat pour inclure la gestion d'une entreprise colossale financée par l'état colonial. Par la même occasion, ils ont contourné leur propre statut ecclésial ambigu, et ont laissé se perpétuer sans contestation la séparation raciale de l'école Belle Vue.

Le résultat immédiat de l'acceptation des subsides est une augmentation considérable du travail scolaire de la Mission, de façon à ce que cet aspect du ministère surpasse bientôt le travail d'évangélisation. L'inscription aux écoles subventionnées grimpe en flèche : le nombre d'élèves inscrit monte de 952 en 1956 à près de 10 000 en 1971⁶⁰. Cependant, comme il fallait s'y attendre, les craintes des missionnaires au sujet de la prédominance éventuelle du travail scolaire sur le développement de l'église locale seront justifiées. Lors d'une visite au Congo en 1956, le secrétaire du conseil d'administration de la Mission conclut que les « demandes du programme scolaire » ont été satisfaites « au prix lourd de l'objectif principal : celui de l'évangélisation et de l'édification de l'Église indigène⁶¹ ». L'acceptation de subsides a aussi jeté les bases d'une pénétration accrue des Églises de Frères mennonites congolaises par l'État,

58 « Resolution », p. 1. Assemblée générale sur le terrain (« Field Council »), 24 au 28 juin 1952, Belle Vue. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Minutes and reports, Field Council, 1949-1954 ».

59 Ibid.

60 « Education and teacher preparation », s.d. [ca. 1971]. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-3, Boîte 6. Dossier : « Education, general & misc., 1969-1987 ».

61 J.B. Toews, « Report 6. J.B. Toews' Administrative Visit to Belgian Congo », p. 5. 1956. Archives de la MB Mission, A250-10-1, Boîte 1, Dossier : « Field visit reports, 1952-1988 ».

d'une façon qui est comparable à la trajectoire des autres églises protestantes au Congo. L'historien Philippe Kabongo-Mbaya a proposé que l'éventuelle transformation de l'Église du Christ au Congo en une Église d'État à caractère hiérarchique, de concert avec l'incapacité quasi absolue de s'opposer au régime Mobutu, ait ses racines dans ce premier virage des Protestants qui consiste à sortir de leur position marginale et à s'harmoniser avec la position du paradigme dominant à travers l'acceptation des subsides⁶². La Mission AMBM et l'Église des Frères mennonites au Congo, qui est en pleine expansion, font évoluer la mission « d'Église libre » à une 'mission coloniale', pour aboutir à une 'Église protestante établie', et la décision d'accepter les subsides joue un rôle clé dans cette trajectoire⁶³.

Conclusion

Dans cette étude, j'ai tenté de montrer comment, même une mission qui insistait sur la séparation de l'Église et de l'État, pouvait jouer un rôle de colonisateur. La décision de l'AMBM d'accepter les subsides est l'aboutissement d'innombrables choix politiques subtils qui, progressivement, renforcent et normalisent, pour les missionnaires et leurs enfants, une identité ecclésiale séparée, basée sur la race. L'institutionnalisation de la séparation entre les missionnaires et les Congolais est incarnée dans l'école pour les enfants de missionnaires, conçue afin de permettre la préservation de leur privilège de Blancs. Le point de bascule est atteint quand les missionnaires se rendent compte qu'ils ne peuvent jouir de ce privilège sans accepter le rôle qui leur est assigné par l'État. Ils abandonnent alors leur réserve initiale au sujet d'une « alliance contre nature » avec l'État. Je n'ai trouvé aucune indication que les missionnaires de l'AMBM aient voulu créer, de façon intentionnelle, une structure ecclésiale à deux niveaux, ni qu'ils voulaient renoncer aux principes chrétiens de l'égalité entre tous les croyants. Cependant, en l'absence de structures démontrant l'égalité raciale dans l'Église, leur idéal de séparation de l'Église et de l'État ne suffisait pas à leur permettre de résister à la pression croissante à collaborer à la légitimation de la domination coloniale.

62 Philippe B. Kabongo-Mbaya, *L'Église du Christ au Zaïre: formation et adaptation d'un protestantisme en situation de dictature*, Paris, Karthala, 1992, p. 79-80, 392.

63 David A Shank, « Book Reviews - CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace », *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, vol. 75, n° 1 (2001), p. 128. Shank fait cette affirmation au sujet de la Congo Inland Mission (CIM), une autre mission mennonite qui œuvre au Congo, mais l'affirmation s'applique également à l'AMBM.

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Je remercie sincèrement la Commission historique des Frères Mennonites (« MB Historical Commission »), qui a défrayé le coût de mon voyage aux Archives en juin 2016.

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Une version anglaise de cet article est parue auparavant dans le journal *Missiology: An International Review*⁶⁴. La présente traduction, comportant de légères différences de formulation et de contenu par rapport à la version anglaise, est publiée avec la permission de SAGE Publishing. Je remercie Karine Chevrier pour son travail minutieux de relecture.

English abstract:

While most Protestant missions in Belgian Congo gladly accepted the colonial state's offer of educational subsidies in 1946, a strong emphasis on church-state separation led the American Mennonite Brethren Mission (AMBM) to initially reject these funds. In a surprising twist, however, the AMBM reversed its position in 1952. Through archival research, I demonstrate that a major factor that led the AMBM to accept subsidies was the creation and institutionalization of a racially separate ecclesial identity from that of Congolese Christians. Moreover, the development of this separate identity was closely intertwined with missionaries' vision for a "white children's school," geographically separated from their work with Congolese. The enactment of white identity helped pave the way for the acceptance of subsidies, both by bringing the missionaries more strongly into the orbit of the colonial logic of domination, and by clarifying the heavy cost of failing to comply with the state's expectations. Through this case study, I engage with the complexity of missionaries' political role in a colonial African context by focusing on the everyday political choices by which missionaries set aside their children as sacred, by exploring how ideas about separateness were embedded into institutions, and by demonstrating how attention to the subtleties of identity performance can shed new light on major missionary decisions.

64 Anicka Fast, « Sacred Children and Colonial Subsidies: The Missionary Performance of Racial Separation in Belgian Congo, 1946-1959 », *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 46, n° 2 (2018), p. 124-36.

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An English version of this article previously appeared in the journal *Missiology: An International Review*.⁶⁴ The present translation by Anicka Fast, which differs slightly from the English original in formulation and content, is published by permission of SAGE Publishing. I wish to thank Karine Chevrier for her careful editing of the translation.

Book Reviews

Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and Struggle in the American West*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2018. 288 pp. \$33.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-027961-5.

Numerous peoples have been forced to grapple with attempts by American settler communities to transform them. The realm called “the religious” is one site where these interactions have played out. In *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and Struggle in the American West*, Jennifer Graber explores one such story. The book follows a series of encounters between the Kiowas Indians¹ and settler Americans in the radically changing American West of the nineteenth century. Using a variety of primary source materials—most notably, Kiowas calendar entries, ledger drawings, tipis, and shields—Graber is able to describe in detail the significant changes that occurred among the Kiowas people in their movement from the open lands of Indian Country to the divided lands that resulted from the process of land allotment in the late-nineteenth century, paying particular attention to the role of ritual interactions with sacred power in this movement. Graber “tracks the ways that ‘religion’ was central to Americans’ acquisition of Indian lands, as well as Kiowa efforts to defend their sovereignty and secure their community’s survival in the face of American territorial expansion” (13). In the process, the reader is caught up in a story that unveils the harsh realities of colonial power, and the role that sacred objects and practices played in both the imposition of that power by settler communities and the attempts at response by the Kiowas.

Paying attention to the source materials from both the missional communities involved in the westward expansion of the United States and the Kiowas communities grappling with this expansion, Graber is able to draw out a number of key themes. She illustrates how Protestant reformers and missionaries working among Native communities in the American West constructed a particular designation—“Friends of the Indian”—in contrast to the dominant logics employed by Americans pushing for military approaches to the so-called “Indian problem.” Using letters, memoirs, governmental and denominational reports, and newspaper and magazine articles, Graber shows how Protestant ministers and missionaries, calling themselves “Friends of the Indian” would repeatedly work to acquire land in Indian Country and argue publically for the transformation of Native peoples

¹ Graber uses the term “Indian” because the term is commonly employed by American writers to refer to Indigenous people in North America. In Canada, the term has become more derogatory.

through peaceful means.² They sought to both Christianize and civilize the Kiowas people in the face of American expansion, thus avoiding the need for military force in the settlement of the West. By naming themselves “Friends of the Indian,” they became situated among the Kiowas as a benevolent presence, actively working to change Kiowas ways of living without having to resort to military violence.

But this designation also served to mask their support and participation in the colonial violence that coincided with the expansion of the United States. Claiming to protect the Kiowas from the threat of American military aggression, the Friends of the Indian worked to acquire land among the Kiowas and pursue a variety of methods of “civilizing” them. During the nineteenth century, the Friends of the Indian mounted a successful campaign that directed Kiowas peoples onto newly formed reservations, over which the Friends of the Indian maintained full control, all in the hopes of both Christianizing and civilizing Kiowas through peaceful means. “To secure the West, white Protestants needed to control the region’s politics, economics, and religious life” (174). They opposed traditional Kiowa interactions with sacred power, and prescribed Indian assimilation through land dispossession and compulsory education, all the while presenting these strategies as gifts to Kiowas and proof of American benevolence. They were successfully keeping Kiowas safe from military aggression but still exposing them to the violence of colonial power through assimilation practices and land dispossession.

The Gods of Indian Country also shows how Kiowas survival of American occupation involved ritual interactions with sacred power, and their ability to adapt as needed. Using Kiowas primary sources, Graber demonstrates how, in the face of the expansion of colonial power in the American West, Kiowas Indians would employ a variety of new ritual practices to keep their people alive and well connected on an increasingly small stretch of land; they continued and adapted their practices and sacred objects as a means to sustain themselves in the face of the powers imposed upon them by the Friends of the Indian and the American state. As these pressures intensified toward the end of the century, they engaged new sources of power and new rites like peyote ingestion, Ghost Dancing, and affiliation with Christian schools. Graber, through her examination of Kiowas material culture, displays the resiliency of the Kiowas people in the face of colonial power as they maintained their long attachments to place and the sacred power that dwelled among them.

2 Mennonites were involved in this work. From 1880 to 1901, Mennonite Boarding Schools were established in the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indian Territory (later known as Oklahoma). For information on Mennonite involvements in Indian Country, see Steve Heinrichs, *Confessing the Past: Mennonites and the Indian School System* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Church Canada, 2013), https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/18842/2013_IR_Confessing_the_Past.pdf?t=1.

A crucial part of their ability to do this was maintaining their ritual practices and adapting them when appropriate.

Graber's text is academic in scope, bringing together a variety of scholarly fields (historiography, religious studies, Native studies) in intriguing ways. It also carries significance for the church as it engages in missional practices in North America and across the globe. Graber does well in showing how many of the Protestant missionaries and reformers engaging with the Kiowas were genuine in both their concern for protecting them from the threat of American military force and ensuring their continued survival in the changing American west. That they continued to obscure the ways in which they exposed the Kiowas to the violence and coercion of colonial expansion only adds to the tragedy of the story. Even good intentions can become violent and horrific when co-opted by colonial power.

What's more, there are many ways in which we see this same impulse emerging in our churches today. For example, the language of friendship is often heard in the work of Indigenous-Settler Relations here in Canada. The desire to be friends with our Indigenous neighbours is growing among the Mennonite churches in my community. But I worry that this desire, especially when it remains severed from the work of actively dismantling the colonial powers that continue to take hold of Indigenous and settler communities across North America, will once again obscure the ways in which our efforts at befriending Indigenous peoples will nevertheless expose them to the continued violent realities of colonial power. Reading this book will remind readers of the need to constantly examine our missional practices, teasing out the ways in which even our best intentions can work to further encourage the expansion of colonial violence. The desire to be "friends of the Indian" is alive and well in a church whose missional impulses remain uncritically examined.

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Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2016. 291 pp., incl. three appendices, endnotes, and two indices. \$24.00. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5146-1.

This important work by Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker begins with a rather startling quote from a Muslim immigrant in Germany claiming that "there is nothing in this entire world that you need to protect more than your honor. Because you're nothing without your honor. You'd be dirt, just dirt and nothing else. If someone tried to take my honor, then I'd do anything to get it back. Literally

anything” (11). For most Western readers, this will sound a bit strange, if not extreme, and that is precisely why this study deserves attention.

According to the authors, there are three primary cultural “types” present in the world: (1) *power-fear culture*, where people are terrorized or threatened by the unseen spiritual world and seek power to overcome it; (2) *innocence-guilt culture*, shaped by individualism and relying on personal conscience, justice, and laws for regulating social behavior; and (3) *honor-shame culture*, characteristic of collectivistic societies where shame and exclusion are applied to people who fail group expectations, and where honor is awarded to loyal members of the community. All societies, claim the authors, share concepts and elements of the three cultural types, although favor is generally granted in specific contexts to dominant tendencies of one type over the others.

Why is this important to gospel communicators and engaged members of the global Christian family? The authors set forth four reasons. First is the predominance of honor-shame perspectives in global cultures. According to Georges and Baker, no less than eighty percent of world cultures—throughout most of Asia, Middle East, Africa, and Latin America—run on honor-shame operating systems. North Americans and Western Europeans are “the odd ones out” with only a “minority share of the global market” (19). Secondly, this has—or should have—a significant effect on global Christian realities as church demographics shift southward. Western theology, we are reminded, “does not exhaust the full meaning and application of biblical truth. [It] itself is not ‘wrong,’ but simply incomplete and limited by cultural blinders” (22). Thirdly, the surge of immigration into Western contexts compels those who live there to become more conversant in the worldviews of their new friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Multiple illustrations are offered by the authors as examples of how misunderstandings and awkward social situations could have been avoided or navigated more smoothly with increased awareness of these cultural differences. And, in the fourth place, the world’s honor-shame cultures—homelands to Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism—present an ongoing missional challenge and opportunity for the church in its embodiment and witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, “a biblical missiology in honor-shame terms may be strategic for fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations” (21).

The structure and content of this book assist readers in delving more deeply into honor-shame perspectives and implications. In Part One, Georges and Baker explore the theme through the lens of cultural anthropology, highlighting the “heart” and “face” of honor-shame cultures. Part Two examines Old and New Testament texts relevant to the topic, such as the national lament found in Psalm 44: “You have made us the *taunt* of our neighbors, the *derision* and *scorn* of those around us. You have made us a *byword* among the nations, a *laughingstock* among the peoples” (43, italics added by Georges and Baker). It is the authors’ firm conviction that

“biblical theology consistently addresses honor and shame because the cultures of the biblical world revolved around those values. The dynamics of honor and shame saturate the biblical texts and shape the narrative of salvation history” (68). Part Three turns to six themes central to practical ministry matters, developing in more depth implications for spirituality, relationships, evangelism, conversion, ethics, and community. Three appendices round out the study with helpful lists of key scriptures, biblical stories, and recommended resources on honor and shame perspectives.

For readers of the *Anabaptist Witness* journal, it is worth noting that Mark D. Baker, one of the authors of this volume, is himself a member of the Mennonite Brethren branch of the Anabaptist family. He served for ten years as a mission worker in Honduras and is currently professor of mission and theology at Fresno (Calif.) Pacific Biblical Seminary. Joining him is Jayson Georges, who has spent nine years in Central Asia doing church planting and microenterprise development. Together, they are primarily concerned about the church’s witness in today’s world and aim to lead readers in a paradigm shift “to see God’s world and God’s Word through a new lens” (30). If this is your first encounter with honor-shame issues and cultures, their contribution in this publication will do just that.

JAMES R. KRABILL lives in Elkhart, Indiana, and has served without shame for over four decades in various capacities with Mennonite Mission Network—earlier Mennonite Board of Missions—despite the fact that younger generations no doubt wonder how he couldn’t manage to “get a life.”

John-Mark Bergen, director, *This Is Why We Go*, Mennonite Brethren Mission, Fresno, CA, 2014. <http://www.mbmission.org/this-is-why-we-go>.

In 2014, MB Mission produced an eighty-seven-minute documentary called *This Is Why We Go*, which takes viewers to three countries hosting members of MB Mission’s Trek program. Trek is an intense, short-term discipleship-in-mission program aimed primarily at young adults. After two months of training in Abbotsford, British Columbia, the young people featured in the film spent seven months in either Mexico, France, or Burkina Faso sharing the gospel with some of the “least-reached people in the world.” Upon their return, they spent another few weeks debriefing.

The filmmaker, John-Mark Bergen, begins his documentary with an unusual (and unnecessary) story about how and where the documentary got made, but soon enough we are flying to Guadalajara, Mexico, home of the Matthew Training Centre (MTC), which trains local disciples for mission. MTC is the base from which Trek members are sent to places, like a poor remote village in the mountains,

where they will work very hard (e.g., carrying water, scraping corn off cobs) for an opportunity to read the Bible to people who can't read.

The first forty minutes of *This Is Why We Go* has the feel of an adventure film as we follow these young people to places that have no running water or electricity, let alone internet access; places where life's purpose revolves entirely around finding enough food and water to survive another day.

But that feel changes dramatically when we fly to Paris, where Trek members stand on street corners, handing out literature to North African immigrants, most of whom are Muslims and therefore among the least-reached. Apparently, churches in Paris (a city repeatedly described as secular) are not as keen on doing this type of mission as North American mission agencies are. When not on the street, Trek members engage in activities like playing soccer to try to form relationships with people who have no friends, usually as an excuse to tell them about Jesus.

The final destination of our Trek journey is rural Burkina Faso, where a Trek member teaches English as an excuse to talk about Jesus. Here again the unreached people are generally Muslims, most of them young children whose parents sometimes get angry at their kids for going to church. Long-term mission workers look after orphans, no doubt a valued service.

The film takes a detour in Burkina Faso, visiting the town where Bergen grew up and showing how his parents' mission work has borne fruit, with a church that now attracts as many as 250 people and had nineteen baptisms the day they visited. To me, this felt like a cheat in a film that's supposedly about Trek rather than the success of MB mission efforts over the years.

From a technical point of view, *This Is Why We Go* is a well-made documentary. The cinematography is strong, the film is fast-paced, and the editing work—which highlights the well-thought-out structure of the documentary—is excellent. Apart from Bergen's ill-advised focus on some of his own story, which probably takes up fifteen minutes of the film, he has done a commendable job of conveying the Trek experience.

And one cannot help but admire the young people who have sacrificed ten months of their lives to be part of that experience. They all faced stresses and challenges that will make them stronger, and they have all gained a broader perspective on the world. Some (in Mexico, at least) were even led to question the values of their materialistic Western culture rather than push their values on others. Throughout, they display a laudable enthusiasm for their difficult task and do their best to help the people to whom they are reaching out.

Nevertheless, I found the content of *This Is Why We Go* overwhelmingly disappointing as an example of Mennonite/Anabaptist mission work, highlighted by

the documentary's title. The reason these young people "go" is to tell unreached people about Jesus, who loves them, gives them what they need, and is the only way to salvation. I find this way of doing mission particularly problematic for Mennonites. The Trek program makes no mention of Mennonite distinctives like peace and social justice. Trek members talk about doing what Jesus asked them to do by bringing people what they need. That need is not what the people have identified as a need but what MB Mission identifies as a need; namely, to hear about Jesus and the Bible. The Jesus I know (and much of the Bible I read) is more concerned with undoing oppression and addressing structural injustice, serving the poor and the needy (needy because they lack the resources to flourish, not because they haven't heard about Jesus). Mission work focused on addressing the real needs of people is what will help those people understand who Jesus is.

The mission work on display in *This Is Why We Go* also is inherently paternalistic, with little acknowledgement of the power dynamics involved, especially in Trek's short-term work (it's hard work, but they will go home in seven months). This is highlighted by the work in France and Burkina Faso, where the focus is on converting Muslims. What does it mean to talk about loving and respecting Muslims regardless of what they believe (as stated by mission workers in the film), when you tell a Muslim woman every day for months that Jesus loves her or you tell children, against the express wishes of their parents, Bible stories about how Jesus died for them?

This Is Why We Go is occasionally inspiring, but mostly it feels wrong to me. Quite apart from the flaws inherent in short-term mission, which my own long-term mission experience helped me to see, the time has surely come for a paradigm shift in evangelical Christian mission—focusing on being Jesus in the world instead of bringing Jesus to the world.

VIC THIESSEN, who spent much of his life doing Mennonite mission work, lives in Winnipeg, where he attends Hope Mennonite Church and hosts monthly documentary film nights.

Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland. 2018. 221 pp. \$25.00. ISBN: 9781538110690.

The August sky was an eerie brownish-orange as the morning news warned Edmontonians not to exert themselves outside. Thick smoke smelling of charred forests blanketed the city, and air quality was so poor that even healthy young people stayed indoors. On a family vacation, we drove through heavy smoke in Southern British Columbia, never able to see the mountains as the province experienced a second year of record-breaking forest fires. It was a fitting time to read *Climate*

Church, Climate World, to ponder the effects of human action on the environment, and to consider the roles and responsibilities of the church in response to environmental issues.

As an Albertan, I find myself stuck between “the sides” in a divisive discourse about pipelines, the environment, and the economy. It is easiest to avoid the discussion entirely because it is explosive and impossible to engage without encountering hard feelings and inadequately informed opinions on all sides. On one hand, I have great respect for the many conscientious and generous people I know who earn a living through the oil industry. I worry about the increasingly dangerous “overland pipeline” the railway has become, and I am anxious about the economy should change happen too abruptly. On the other hand, I resonate strongly with the imperative of environmental protection, and I want a system that does not exploit nonrenewable resources. As a child of the Creator, my faith life must be one of caring for all people and all creation. My church must be a voice for this caring. The church, however, struggles with its own cacophony of voices and opinions and is likewise stuck between sides, unable to have open and healthy discussion on the issues and responsibilities we face with climate change. Perhaps the church and the environment are both at a crucial crossroads. There is opportunity for positive change as well as the possibility of catastrophe.

Antal’s book offers a well-written and well-supported encouragement for individual and communal engagement with the issue of climate change in ways that could lead to positive change. Many of the practical frustrations I hear in Alberta are raised clearly and helpfully in this book’s pages. One of these, the argument that our necessary use of fuel renders protesting the oil industry hypocritical, is gently and effectively addressed. Quoting an example of how slave owners were not suddenly hypocrites when they joined the abolition movement, Antal points out that “people enmeshed in a flawed system are not exempt from the struggle to transform that system” (70). He encourages confession of complicity along with active engagement of the theological, social, economic, and spiritual work that spurs transformation.

The needed transformation feels overwhelming, another common excuse for inaction that I hear (and viscerally share) among Christians. Antal, however, argues that faith communities have a moral imperative to repurpose themselves for this transformation, because it is so important that it cannot be ignored. Instead of being relegated to just another optional ideology or issue for congregations, climate change is the “umbrella issue” under which all others fit. Antal writes, “If the work of the church is to make God’s love and justice real, and since climate change amplifies every other social justice issue, it falls to the church to create the conditions in which people can face the reality of climate change and respond to God’s call to take action to protect God’s gift of creation” (123). He makes a strong case for preachers and churches to engage hopefully and consistently in the issues of climate

change in every aspect of church life and work: “We need to accept that we are not called to be a church for ourselves. We are called to be a church for others” (135).

This umbrella perspective is helpful. When I consider even a few of the issues my home church, and others like it, have faced in the last number of years—“greening” our buildings, charitable relief work, responding to disasters, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and our response, and learning to communicate across differing opinions—it is quite clear how these can all fit under the umbrella. Repurposing the church to be less about individuals and more about communal salvation is a faithful and hope-filled move into our shared future. Antal writes, “A repurposed church that explicitly values continuity of creation could declare our moral interdependence with our billions of neighbors the world over as well as our countless yet-to-be-born neighbors” (74).

What I appreciate most about Antal’s book is the practicality of his reasoning and the insistent conviction that the church is a meaningful agent of change. His practical suggestions face the uncomfortable issues of climate change head on, dismantling apathy without inflicting unnecessary guilt. While I am energized by his belief in the voice of the church and the examples of how this voice is crucial to social change, a needed critique of the church is missing; the rise of populist religion and an oft-repeated history of being resistant to needed social changes is a huge and difficult matter right now. While the church is a catalyst for change, it can also be a formidable obstacle to it, rationalizing and interpreting scripture to meet its own desires.

Climate Church, Climate World is thought-provoking, hopeful, and practical. I would love to see this book as “urgent required reading” for church leaders. I wonder what might happen within a denomination that takes this on as a study? Could a repurposed and revitalized church emerge? With discussion questions concluding each chapter, the book is also an accessible and engaging focus for book clubs and Bible study groups and is sure to inspire passionate, helpful engagement with beliefs, issues, and the practice of faith as we long for the return of blue skies and a smoke-free future.

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