

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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Anabaptist Missiology Revisited

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Editorial

Twenty-five years ago, a group of Anabaptist mission thinkers, administrators, and practitioners gathered at Techny Towers, north of Chicago, to reflect on issues related to the field of Anabaptist missiology. Papers presented explored key biblical and theological themes, ecclesiological implications of an Anabaptist approach to mission, anthropological insights appropriated by mission workers in the field, and leadership trends that had emerged in recent years. The group decided that these discussions were fruitful enough to warrant meeting again. This turned out to be the launching of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists (AAM)—a network of interested, mostly North American scholars, church planters, professors, Bible translators, and other field workers who developed relationships, resourced each other, and stayed connected for the next fifteen years (2000–2015).

This issue of *Anabaptist Witness* is called “Anabaptist Missiology Revisited.” The reader will “revisit” missiology from an Anabaptist perspective in three ways. First, in the opening essay, the AAM story will be told from its origins, through its nineteen in-person gatherings, and on to its principal publications and other activities. In a second block of essays, the four papers presented at the initial AAM gathering in 2000 are brought together for the first time in a single published collection. They include Calvin E. Shenk’s reflections on “Anabaptist Missiology: Biblical Foundations”; then, Stan and Delores Friesen’s “Anabaptist Missiology: Anthropological Perspectives”; Lois Barrett’s “Anabaptist Missiology: Ecclesiological Considerations”; and, finally, Wilbert R. Shenk’s “Anabaptist Missiology: Leadership Trends.” Though formulated and presented two and a half decades ago, we contend that these essays still hold considerable interest and value for our lives today. We are thus inviting readers to revisit them with this in mind.

We all know, on the other hand, that much has changed in the past twenty-five years. Mennonite World Conference has increased in membership from an estimated 1.1 to 1.2 million in the year 2000 to a 2025 actual figure of 1.45 million members. Most of this growth has occurred in the Global South: in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As already noted, the presenters at the first AAM gathering were all North American. So, it is time to revisit the perspectives of the North American writers by inviting views from sisters and brothers from the global faith family. This will happen in essays following each of the original presentations, written by contemporary voices from various places around the world. Reflecting on Calvin Shenk’s article on biblical foundations, we will hear from Congolese American Nzash Lumeya. On the anthropological perspectives offered by Stan and Delores Friesen, we have the voice of Elisabeth Kunjam from India.

Responding to Lois Barrett's ecclesiological considerations, we hear reflections from Ethiopian Ruth Gelane. And addressing Wilbert R. Shenk's essay on leadership trends are the insights of Indonesian Andi Santoso.

Rounding out these rich reflections, readers will find two book reviews—also including global voices—with Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun's challenge to Mennonites to become more inclusively and intentionally intercultural (reviewed by Quinn Brenneke), and Peter Sensenig's clarion appeal for followers of Jesus to become good friends, guests, and hosts to Muslim neighbors (reviewed by Rebeka Moeljono).

James R. Krabill
Interim editor

The Birth, Goals, and Activities of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists, 2000–2015

James R. Krabill

Introduction

The year 2000 was a tumultuous year for multiple reasons. It represented the last year of the second millennium and the first year of the twenty-first century. Often referred to as “Y2K”—where “K” stood for “kilo,” or “thousand”—there were considerable fears that computers would not shift from 1999 to 2000 correctly, resulting in a technological meltdown and subsequent chaos worldwide. Religious pundits were actively predicting everything from global wars, to the return of Christ, to the end of the world as we knew it. Some people hoarded their earthly possessions and hunkered down, expecting the worst to happen.

In North American Mennonite communities—particularly in the case of two historic binational denominations, the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church—a decade-long period of negotiations was moving toward a merger of the two, resulting in the creation of two new national entities, Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. Structurally, Mennonite Church USA would be composed of four program agencies—education, publication, stewardship, and mission—the latter officially acquiring the new name in early 2002 of the “Mennonite Mission Network.”

In preparation for these new mission realities, multiple committees, task forces, and study groups were formed to review the legacies of merging commissions and agencies, to study current Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and Evangelical trends in mission thinking and practice, and to identify key biblical and theological themes shaping Anabaptist missiology. As the time for merger approached in early 2000, consultants from the Church Innovations Institute in St. Paul, Minnesota, were hired to guide the “Mission Transformation Project”

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through the upcoming stages of the transition process. In a 2006 Mennonite Mission Network publication entitled *Together in Mission: Core Beliefs, Values and Commitments of Mennonite Mission Network*, nearly twenty separate documents, created primarily during the late 1990s and early 2000s, were listed as “sources that have shaped our vision.”¹ Titles of these documents included “A Guiding Theology of Missions: Final Report” (study group), “Emerging Trends in North American Mission Agencies” (study group report), “The Emerging Context in Missions” (study group report), and numerous others.

I was recruited by Stanley W. Green, the new executive director/CEO of what would become the Mennonite Mission Network, to give leadership to Global Ministries—the program division of the new agency, which was inheriting the rich legacy of its predecessor agencies’ ministry involvements in fifty-five countries and thirty-one states in the United States. In addition, I was asked to devote one quarter of my time to “missiological research”—a kind of research and development (R&D) function—through writing, preaching, teaching, and engaging mission-related conversations with Mennonite high school, college, and seminary educational institutions.

The Inaugural Gathering of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists (AAM)

With this as background to the flurry of conversations happening at the time, I contacted a number of fellow binational and inter-Mennonite missiologists—Walter Sawatsky (Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, IN), Nzash Lumeya and Mark Baker (Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, CA), Titus Guenther (Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB, Canada) and Linford Stutzman (Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, VA)—to test their interest in forming a working team to build a network of scholars and practitioners committed to exploring and promoting Anabaptist missiology. After several rounds of discussion by phone and hard-copy mail correspondence, and with group agreement on a working name for the network, the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists (AAM), we decided to call together people of potential interest from our various networks for a one-and-a-half-day consultation on January 20 and 21, 2000, at Techny Towers, north of Chicago. This would happen on the front end of the Council of International Ministries (CIM), the annual meeting of North American Anabaptist mission and service program administrators and executives.²

1 James R. Krabill, ed., *Together in Mission: Core Beliefs, Values and Commitments of Mennonite Mission Network*, Missio Dei no. 10 (Mennonite Mission Network), 16.

2 While the primary work of CIM was programmatic updating and collaborative brainstorming among administrators, the group did over the years publish pamphlets of a missiological nature and engage in discussions of common interest to participating

Letters went out to anyone who might be interested in such a gathering. By early January, fifty-five people had responded expressing their intention to be in attendance. Several others—including a few prominent Anabaptist mission thinkers or practitioners, like Hans Kasdorf, Neal Blough, C. Norman Kraus, Irene Weaver, David W. Shenk, Erwin Rempel, and Jacob A. Loewen—sent regrets due to prior commitments and words of encouragement nonetheless for such an initiative. “I am delighted with your plans,” wrote C. Norman Kraus. “I am very grateful that a meeting is being planned,” said David W. Shenk. “This meeting is long overdue. I will be there in spirit,” Jacob Loewen responded. It appeared, therefore—and a bit to our surprise—that there was significant interest in such a gathering, and we planned with that in mind.³

Three specific goals for the meeting were identified:

1. To bring together a group of Anabaptist-Mennonite mission thinkers, writers, professors, and practitioners to reflect on the particular contribution of Anabaptist missiology.
2. To explore what interest there might be in creating a regular, ongoing forum for discussing mission research projects, presenting new publications, and responding to oral or written presentations on Anabaptist missiological themes.
3. To celebrate the important contributions of an older generation of North American mission leaders who have significantly shaped Mennonite-Anabaptist mission vision, theology, policy, and praxis in the past few decades.

The meeting format for the gathering would include informal time, with space for acquainting, remembering, chatting, and connecting. The event would

agencies. At the January 20–24, 2000, meeting, for example, following the AAM gathering, two half-days with plenary sessions and workshops were devoted to the theme “Waging Spiritual Warfare for the Gospel of Peace.”

3 It would be a helpful exercise for someone to document similar mission-focused gatherings throughout the five centuries of Anabaptist history. There was, of course, the 1527 Augsburg consultation of fifty-some Anabaptist leaders designed to make plans for evangelizing Europe. Within a year, all but three—in what has become known as the Martyrs’ Synod—had been arrested, imprisoned, tortured, expelled, or killed. Many other less-dramatic gatherings could also be recorded. During my time as a student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (Elkhart, IN) in the mid-1970s and continuing on into at least the 1980s, there existed an association of inter-Mennonite missiologists (professors, researchers, program directors, and administrators) who gathered annually at AMBS to compare notes on issues of current personal research, discuss new publications, interact with non-Mennonite guest speakers (e.g., Andrew Walls, Walter Hollenweger, Jim Wallis, David Bosch), and, in general, debate missiological matters of particular interest to members of the Mennonite/Anabaptist community.

begin with a common dinner on Thursday, January 20, then proceed throughout the program on Friday, January 21, and end with a celebrative banquet honoring a group of invited guests on Friday evening. The formal content of the gathering would be organized around four thirty-to-forty-minute “interpretive” presentations designed to set the stage for reflection and discussion among participants. The four topics would focus on issues related to Anabaptist missiology: (1) “biblical foundations” (presented by Calvin E. Shenk); (2) “anthropological perspectives” (Stan and Delores Friesen); (3) “ecclesiological considerations” (Lois Barrett); and “leadership trends” (Wilbert R. Shenk).

Worship times were interspersed throughout the gathering, and at the end small groups were formed to discuss and report to the larger group on five questions:

1. *What should be the future of a group such as this Association of Anabaptist Missiologists* (regular meetings, with what frequency, in connection with CIM or separate)?
2. *What themes might be treated in a future gathering?*
3. *Who should be invited to future AAM meetings, not on the mailing list for this gathering* (other Anabaptist-related missiologists, non-Anabaptist observer-participants, more women, missiologists focused on the North American context, international participants, more ethnic variety, college/seminary students in mission study programs, etc.)?
4. *What “projects” might a group like AAM work on together* (updated bibliographies, anthology of significant texts, syllabus-sharing, clearing house for useful teaching materials, collection of “mission stories that need to be told,” series of modest *Festschriften*, a “relevant Anabaptist missiology for the new millennium,” etc.)?
5. *What are your reflections on this first gathering of the AAM* (e.g., counsel, overall appraisal, suggestions for improvement)?

The evening ended with a banquet celebrating the lives and contributions to mission of a group of invited guests: Willard and Alice Roth, John A. Lapp, Theron Schlabach, Melvin Loewen, Don Jacobs, and David A. Shank. Special recognition certificates were presented to each of the guests with descriptions of their particular contributions.

In a news story about the event released by Mennonite Mission Network on February 23, 2000, it was reported that “participants discussed the distinctiveness of Anabaptist mission, the role of nonviolence and nonconformity in mission, the impact of religious pluralism . . . the future of mission . . . the future shape of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists and ways to bring international voices

into the discussions.”⁴ Another prominent theme that pervaded the conversations, according to the press release, was “the desire to hold together theory and practice.”

Consultations

Based on the feedback from the survey conducted at the first AAM gathering in January 2000, the working team of organizers decided to hold a second gathering later in the same year, from December 7 to 9, this time at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. The multi-day event included two plenary presentations: “The contribution of Anabaptist mission thinking and practice to the larger church” (by Jonathan Bonk, with respondents Myron Augsburg, Nancy Heisey and Art McPhee) and “Methods and curriculum for teaching missions from an Anabaptist perspective” (by Linford Stuzman, with respondents C. Norman Kraus, Calvin Shenk, Walter Sawatsky, and Lawrence Yoder).

Other features included updates from participants on “half-baked” research or writing projects, newly-released publications, “videos I use in the classroom,” an update by Walter Sawatsky as editor of the Anabaptist missiological journal *Mission Focus: Annual Review* (“Eight years and a hundred articles later”), and a progress report on the expanding bibliography by and about Anabaptists involved in mission and service initiatives, *Anabaptism and Mission: A Bibliography, 1859–2000*.⁵

A third gathering happened a year later in connection with the CIM at Techny Towers, north of Chicago, from January 25 to 27, 2002. The featured speaker during a plenary session and again during the Saturday evening banquet was Samuel Escobar, who shared about his pilgrimage of faith and the impact of Anabaptism on his missiological thought and praxis. The banquet itself commemorated the lives and work of several Mennonite missiologists, with lifetime recognition certificates for Robert and Alice Ramseyer, John Driver, C. Norman Kraus, and Paul Hiebert. Research updates from attendees included work on early church/Christendom studies, worldview transformation, peace and the gospel,

4 Mennonite Mission Network, “Missiologists Gather to Celebrate Past, Contemplate Future,” news release, February 23, 2000.

5 This was soon to be published under the above-mentioned title and was edited by Chad Mullet Bauman and James R. Krabill (Mennonite Mission Network, 2002). The listing, in alphabetical order by author, included more than 3,250 entries—books, journal articles, book reviews, unpublished documents, thesis titles, etc.—with references to documents in eight languages (English, German, Spanish, French, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, and Indonesian). The bibliography has been updated twice, in 2011 and 2025. A copy of the 2011 edition appears on the Mennonite World Conference website, and the 2025 update is scheduled for posting by the end of 2026; see “Anabaptism and Mission: An Online Bibliography 1859–2011,” Mennonite World Conference, <https://mwc-cmm.org/en/resources/anabaptism-and-mission-online-bibliography-1859-2011/>.

youth and mission, biblical theology of mission, various translation projects, and a smattering of initiatives on the history and growth of Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, the Congo, and eastern Europe.

Later that same year, from September 27 to 29, 2002, a fourth AAM meeting took place, this time hosted by Mark Baker and Nzash Lumeya on the campus of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. The missiological work of Mennonite Brethren scholars was central to this gathering, with Paul Hiebert providing plenary input and Hans Kasdorf being honored for his important work on Anabaptist mission history and theology.

AAM gatherings took place once or twice a year for the next decade, many hosted by Mennonite seminaries in United States, but also at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba (2007) and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (2008). On several occasions (2005, 2009, and 2011), AAM partnered with and supported the (Wilbert) Shenk Mission Lectureship series hosted by Walter Sawatsky at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries. The majority of the AAM gatherings were held in collaboration with the CIM during its annual meeting north of Chicago or elsewhere.

Nineteen AAM gatherings took place between 2000 and 2012, with smaller check-ins happening from 2013 to 2016. The times and places of these events were:

1. Chicago/CIM (January 2000)
2. Eastern Mennonite Seminary (December 2000)
3. Chicago/CIM (January 2002)
4. Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno (September 2002)
5. Chicago/CIM (January 2003)
6. Eastern Mennonite Seminary (October 2003)
7. Pittsburgh/CIM (2004)
8. Pittsburgh/CIM (January 2005)
9. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (November 2005)
10. Pittsburgh/CIM (2006)
11. Canadian Mennonite University (2007)
12. Chicago/CIM (January 2008)
13. Fuller Theological Seminary (October 2008)
14. Chicago/CIM (January 2009)
15. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (October 2009)
16. Chicago/CIM (2010)
17. Chicago/CIM (January 2011)
18. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (September 2011)
19. Chicago/CIM (2012)
20. Smaller check-ins at CIM (2013–2016)

Presentations and Publications

At nearly every AAM gathering, substantive papers were presented on issues related to Anabaptist missiology. With Walter Sawatsky as a member of the AAM planning committee and as editor of the journal *Mission Focus*, many of these presentations made their way into the compilation of articles appearing each year in the *Mission Focus: Annual Review*. While the AAM did not actually publish anything on its own, it did partner with and widely promote several publications of importance to Anabaptist missiology:

1. **Bibliography.** We have already referenced *Anabaptism and Mission: A Bibliography, 1859–2000*. The AAM network of members became an important resource for updating authors and writings that should be included.
2. **Anabaptist consultation on Islam.** From October 23 to 26, 2003, AAM participated in organizing, promoting, and seeing through to publication “An Anabaptist Consultation on Islam: The Church Meets the Muslim Community.” The gathering was held at Eastern Mennonite University, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and was financially sponsored by Mennonite Mission Network, Eastern Mennonite Missions, and the John S. Coffman Center of Eastern Mennonite Seminary. About two hundred people registered for the consultation, with more than three hundred attending some plenary sessions. Some fifteen Mennonite agencies or church communities made presentations, and reports of “learnings” were shared from eighteen countries. In addition to plenary presentations—including two by non-Mennonite Islamicists, J. Dudley Woodberry (Fuller Theological Seminary) and Lamin Sanneh (Yale Divinity School)—fifteen seminars focused on core concerns that Mennonites encounter in meeting Muslims. The proceedings of the consultation were eventually published with the title *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the Way of Christ*, edited by James R. Krabill, David W. Shenk, and Linford Stutzman (Herald Press, 2005), 566 pp.
3. **W. R. Shenk *Festschrift*.** Two members of the AAM planning committee, along with Charles Van Engen, Fuller Professor of Biblical Theology of Mission, worked together to produce a *Festschrift* in honor of the significant lifelong contribution of Anabaptist missiologist Wilbert R. Shenk. Shenk’s professional life had taken place working primarily for three institutions—Mennonite Board of Missions, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, and Fuller Theological Seminary—so writers were recruited from these various chapters of Shenk’s life to reflect on his key contributions to mission thought and practice. Twenty-six authors responded to the request of the editors, and a volume

came together with the title *Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation*, edited by James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles E. Van Engen (Orbis Books, 2006), 336 pp. At the 2005 joint meeting of the AMBS Shenk Mission Lectureship and the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists held on the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries campus, AAM was able to present Shenk with a certificate of recognition for his considerable contribution to Anabaptist missiology.

4. **Selected writings of David A. Shank.** The presentation of one other important publication took place four years later in October 2009 at a joint gathering of AAM and AMBS's Shenk Mission Lectureship. In this case, it was the publication of a collection of writings by Anabaptist missiologist David A. Shank, who with his wife, Wilma, had spent a lifetime in ministry, first in Europe (1950–1973), then in West Africa (1979–1989), with the Mennonite Board of Missions. Shank's specialty was writing insightful articles, which had been published in a variety of places but never brought together in one volume as a compiled collection. This finally happened in the publication *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings and the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, edited by James R. Krabill (Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 351 pp. Shank was able to attend the presentation and make some comments, but passed away less than a year later.

AAM Membership and Certificates of Recognition

The Association of Anabaptist Missiologists was never a proper “institution.” It was a network of people passionate about exploring and promoting mission thinking and practice as seen, understood, and experienced through the lens of Anabaptism. AAM never had a budget; it functioned primarily on volunteer effort and through generous partners like Mennonite Mission Network, the Council of International Ministries, and the various universities and seminaries who graciously hosted the network gatherings. Two expert assistants at Mennonite Mission Network, first Karen Ritchie and then Marcella Hershberger, compiled materials and managed hard-copy mailings to a growing list of interested AAM members. Yes, hard-copy mailings—because even at the end of AAM activities in 2015, many members still did not have a personal email address.

At its peak, AAM had almost 150 subscribed “members” on the mailing list—people who received regular correspondence and who attended gatherings whenever and wherever they were able. An increasing number of those members wrote to AAM from international locations—from Colombia, Finland, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, France, Botswana, Austria, Germany,

Lithuania, and China—wanting more information and wishing something similar would exist in their own countries.

In addition to this network of interested members, AAM regularly honored special guests in celebrative banquets of Anabaptist-Mennonites who had contributed in some unique way to the mission effort—as administrators, Bible translators, mission historians, medical personnel, authors, teachers, anthropologists, or church planters. An attempt was made to recognize workers, men and women, from various North American denominations and mission agencies—from the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, the Brethren in Christ, the Conservative Mennonite mission efforts, Virginia Mennonite Missions, Eastern Mennonite Mission, and Mennonite Central Committee.

In 2011, the AMBS Shenk Mission Lectureship hosted a tribute to the Global Mennonite History Project of Mennonite World Conference. Edited by John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder, this initiative had produced five volumes of Anabaptist-Mennonite church history, written entirely by teams of local authors from the various regions and continents they represented—Africa (ten writers), Europe (nine), Latin America (five), Asia (fifteen), and North America (two). The three days of meeting were graced with reports and presentations from around the world: “The Dalit Character of Indian Churches” (I. P. Asheervadam); “Patterns from the Global South: Africa” (Barbara Nkala, Zimbabwe); “Peoplehood and/or Ethnicity in the Global Mennonite Story” (Jaime Prieto, Latin America); “Critical Issues Between Global South and North America” (with three presenters, Chiou-Lang (Paulus) Pan of Taiwan, Titus Guenther of Canada, and Getu Abeche of Ethiopia); and “New Mennonites and Mission: Whose Story to Tell?” (Juan Martinez). Several members of the AAM participated in the gathering, and at the end AAM certificates of recognition were given to the eighteen international writers in attendance.

Over the course of AAM’s existence (2000–2015) more than seventy-five mission workers, administrators, and scholars were honored with personalized certificates of recognition for their contribution to the Anabaptist-Mennonite mission effort.

Concluding Reflections

Launched in 2000 with a burst of energy, the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists gradually lost steam after a decade and a half of networking, gatherings, and other activities. There were probably multiple reasons for this, including the dwindling of volunteer staff to keep it alive. Now, ten years out, it would seem helpful to reflect back on the experience to see what lessons might be learned.

Celebrating a Generation of Pioneers

Wilbert R. Shenk observed in his presentation at the inaugural gathering of AAM in January 2000 that North American missions in the post-World War II era (1945–1960) was a time of rapid program development. “On these grounds,” said Shenk, “we can justifiably call this the ‘golden age’ of Mennonite missions.” He goes on to note that during this time “an unprecedented fifty-three new missions were founded with a view to the establishment of viable new churches.” The current worldwide reality we see today of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ faith communities, Shenk adds, “owes a great deal to this seminal period.”

Most of the seventy-five mission workers, administrators, and scholars honored by AAM with personalized certificates of recognition were the product of this dynamic period. It was not unusual for AAM organizers to receive emotional, sometimes tearful, words of deep-felt gratitude from recipients for recognizing their many years of commitment and service. By 2015, most of these folks had passed on, but the privilege of being able to celebrate in person their important contributions to the mission effort was more than gratifying at the time and perhaps one of the most important features of the AAM initiative.

Building Networks and Consolidating Resources

The AAM gatherings were rich experiences of bringing people together from multiple backgrounds, professions, and ministry contexts. There was an excitement about sharing new resources, presenting ongoing research projects, and discussing efforts regarding how best to teach mission courses in colleges and seminaries. Creating bibliographical resources and other documents on the history and theology of Anabaptist missions is a legacy that can be passed on to future generations interested in this field of reflection and praxis. An informal network of younger Anabaptist missiologists, in fact, currently meets occasionally online to discuss the future of the discipline and to share their research on migration studies, Muslim-Christian relations, peace and the Gospel, immigrant church realities, leadership challenges, and church-planting efforts in post-Christendom contexts.

The Deficit of Diverse Voices

From the very first gathering and throughout AAM’s history, it was obvious that much of the conversation was happening about and between North American white males. The lack of women’s voices—and particularly those from majority-world contexts—was a constant concern among AAM members and one that was never resolved. The emergence of social media and video-chat

6 Shenk’s 2000 presentation is reproduced in this current issue of *Anabaptist Witness* on pages 85–95.

connections in more recent times has revolutionized the church's capacity to encourage mutual exchanges and develop fruitful debates about what Anabaptist missiology can and should look like in the diverse contexts of the global Anabaptist family.

The Mission Commission of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) is aware of this challenge, and their work may help point the way to some solutions. During the period from 2009 to 2015, members of the commission from nine countries worked to identify key characteristics of mission thought and practice through an Anabaptist lens. Then, in 2014, they adopted ten missional statements, inspired and based on MWC's "Shared Convictions," under the title "God's People in Mission: An Anabaptist Perspective." To create more content, they invited writers from eight countries to reflect on these statements and write chapters for a book that was subsequently published by Mennonite World Conference in 2018.⁷ This is a great beginning, but so much more still needs to be done.

From the Study of "Missiology" to "World Christianity"

Truth be told, some of the waning interest in missiology as a discipline is the product of the relentless characterization within Western academic circles of the devastating effect of Christian mission activity as a partner in the imperialistic, colonizing activities of Euro-American hegemonic intent and reach in recent centuries. That reality and representation are an ongoing challenge with which missiologists—including Anabaptist ones—need to contend.

But there is another shift happening among Christian scholars due to world demographic shifts, globalization, and migration, resulting in Christianity, according to Catholic theologian Peter C. Phan, "becoming more than ever diverse, multiple, transnational, and polycentric in all aspects of its life."⁸ Still implicit for many Western scholars, claims Phan, "is the colonialist understanding of Christianity and the church as the West and mission as the rest. Church history then deals with the Western churches, dubbed 'historic churches,' and missiology with 'mission lands,' with their presumably immature 'younger churches,' beholden in every way, not least financially, to the historic churches."⁹ Phan encourages Christian scholars, including missiologists, to focus increasingly on World Christianity, "in which all churches are local churches, with none at the center and the others at the periphery, with none as the historic church and the

7 Stanley W. Green and Rafael Zarcho, eds., *God's People in Mission: An Anabaptist Perspective* (Mennonite World Conference, 2018). Available online at <https://mwc-cmm.org/en/resources/gods-people-mission-anabaptist-perspective/>.

8 Peter C. Phan, "Teaching Missiology in and for World Christianity: Content and Method," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 4 (October 2018): 360.

9 Ibid., 362.

rest younger churches, with no part of the world as Christian territory and the rest mission lands.”¹⁰

This shift became clear when the Overseas Ministries Study Center, for years located in New Haven, Connecticut, and focusing on missiology in a more traditional sense, moved in 2019/2020 to the Princeton Theological Seminary campus and began increasingly promoting dialogue around world Christianity, with the goal of amplifying the voices of the world Christian movement.

This does not mean, however, the demise of missiology as a discipline, though it *will* need to be reimagined and rearticulated in new and creative ways. For, without mission, says Phan, “theology is bound to become a tribal, provincial, sclerotic in-house shoptalk, often in air-conditioned university and seminary smart classrooms. By contrast, mission operates on the open and unfamiliar borders of countries, classes, ethnicities, genders, cultures, Christian denominations, and religions. Missionaries, as the etymology implies, are people being sent out. By vocation they are border-crossers, and border-crossers have the best opportunities to discover new and strange things. . . . Indeed, it is missionaries who alerted theologians to the emergence of World Christianity occurring under their very noses.”¹¹

I have attempted in this essay to capture a particular chapter in the ongoing development of missiology with an Anabaptist lens. The Association of Anabaptist Missiologists served an important purpose in a particular time and place. But times and foci change. If it is true that we can’t move forward into the future without knowing where we’ve been, then perhaps recounting the brief history of the AAM can help us in doing just that.

In the remainder of this issue of *Anabaptist Witness*, we will dip into the past to hear some of the voices that still speak truth to our contemporary reality, and then turn to new global voices that will increasingly shape conversations and practices for the Anabaptist faith family in the years ahead.

10 Ibid., 364.

11 Ibid., 361.

Anabaptist Missiology: Biblical Foundations¹

Calvin E. Shenk

Introduction: God's Mission and Our Mission

Mission was central to the early Anabaptist movement, when much of the church had neglected that dimension of faith because they insisted that the Great Commission was given only to the early church. Anabaptists accepted both the Great Commission of Matt 28:19–20 and Jesus's model for compassionate mission in Luke 4:16–20. They were concerned that people of unfaith become believers.

We affirm that mission begins with God (*missio Dei*—the mission of God). The triune God is the subject of mission, the author of mission. Mission is God's cause, God's work; God loved and sent (John 3:16). God is a missionary God—God sent Christ; God sent the Spirit. Mission originates in God's nature and intention for the world. God acts on behalf of the world. Mission is thus a gift of God's grace. Our message and model for mission are found in Jesus Christ. As David Bosch has said, "Mission is the predicate of Christology."²

1 This presentation by Calvin E. Shenk was one of four papers presented at the inaugural meeting of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists (AMM) at Techny Towers north of Chicago, IL, in January 2000, under the title "Anabaptist Missiology: Biblical Foundations." At the time of the presentation, Shenk was serving as a Mennonite Board of Missions worker in Israel for six months of each year, and as a professor at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA, for six months. The presentation had first appeared in an unpublished collection of articles he edited for the Council of International Ministries by other Mennonite missiologists called *A Relevant Anabaptist Missiology for the 1990s* (Council of International Ministries, 1990), 63–92. Shenk died in 2015.

2 Calvin E. Shenk, the author of this piece, makes occasional references to other missiologists in his text. Since this was originally an oral presentation, however, the citations were not footnoted, leaving the reader without the usual documentation to track down sources. Lisa Guedea Carreño, AMBS Interim Director of Library Services, spent considerable time trying to track down the sources of these citations. We will report her findings in the footnotes. Where she was unsuccessful, we will simply include the quotation without a corresponding reference. As for the current David J. Bosch statement, this is found in his book *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective*

Mission is essential to the church. Emil Brunner was right when he declared, “The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.”³ The church participates with God in mission. Mission is the church-in-movement for the salvation of the world. Mission is the church crossing frontiers, bearing witness to the gospel at the borders of faith and unbelief. We need to emphasize the centrality of mission in our day when there is loss of conviction for Christ-centered mission.

Mission is not just obedience to a commission but grows out of an encounter with Christ. Without love for Christ, obedience to a command can become legalism. Mission becomes an “ought” instead of joy, hope, love, and thanksgiving. The commission of Christ in Matt 28 must be connected with the promise of the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). We are enlisted and led by the Spirit. Mission is more than a humanly structured activity; it is first of all the ministry of the Spirit.

Secularism and pluralism have undermined our commitment to mission. The fear of arrogance has led to a profound crisis of faith in the Western churches. People feel embarrassment and guilt because of some forms of missionary practice. Clearly, we need to make sure that we do not do mission from positions of superiority and power. But some have another kind of embarrassment. Their problem is not only with the *how* of mission, but with the *why*. They are not sure faith in Christ is so decisive that it must be shared with others. Can we focus on mission as the work of the triune God in which we are invited to participate? This understanding will condition our motivation and attitude.

Theology and Mission

If we are concerned today for a relevant Anabaptist missiology, careful theological thinking is required. Theology is the child of mission. As the first Christians crossed frontiers, they theologized. From this we got our New Testament. As Hans Kasdorf said, “Mission theology is a theology of the road, a pilgrim theology.”⁴ If this is the nature of theology, it is important to keep reflecting on our theology. Strategies and methodologies must not be allowed to override biblical-theological principles or usurp the place of the Holy Spirit.

One of our important tasks is theological formation of people for mission. How can we help people to think theologically about what they are doing?

(John Knox Press, 1980), 82. Bosch’s full quote there is “Mission is therefore, according to the New Testament, a predicate of Christology.”

3 In Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (Student Christian Movement Press, 1931), 108. The exact quote is: “The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.”

4 A possible source for this statement is in Kasdorf’s *Design of My Journey: An Autobiography* (Center for Mennonite Biblical Studies; Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2004), 295, where he writes, “Missiology’s . . . greatest challenge lies in its pilgrim-like nature, always on the move along the paths on which the missionaries are moving. . . . It has not arrived; it is on the open road to an open future with a blessed hope.”

Mennonites have not done enough in this regard. In the context of ministry, every missionary confronts important new questions. In responding to these questions missionaries on location often borrow theologies, and they become eclectic in that process. They develop an implicit theology without full knowledge of its rootage or implications.

We affirm theologizing in context, but this must be done with discernment. Often people are not aware that they have borrowed other theologies or to what degree such theologies are compatible with an Anabaptist theology. Responsible borrowing is possible when one knows one's own heritage, understands various biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical traditions, and grasps the culture in which one is working. When adequate knowledge or discernment is lacking, there can easily be dissonance between missionary practice and the Anabaptist vision.

But there is yet another opportunity before us. We have the obligation to clarify the theological basis of our mission initiatives. Two non-Mennonite missiologists, Charles Taber and Samuel Escobar, have urged Anabaptists to be truer to our theological tradition.⁵ Our theological statements are often eclectic. Is it that we do not understand Anabaptist perspectives, or that we prefer and deliberately borrow from other traditions? Our statements often show insufficient insight into the relevance of Anabaptist theology.

All theologies, of course, are selective in their use of the Bible or Christian tradition. Mennonites are no exception. How shall we develop an adequate theology? Clearly it must be biblical. It must be consistent with the whole Christ. And it should be compatible with our tradition. We share much with other traditions, but we also differ in important respects. As we develop a theology, we will certainly interact with other traditions—but let us not shortchange our Anabaptist tradition. We have learned much from others that is beneficial, but frequently we borrow others' agendas, which are not consistent with our tradition: either with our theology or our style of working.

I will try here to focus my remarks on significant themes that confront us as Anabaptists in the years ahead. I have sketched foundational theological understandings in relation to selected topics and then identified current implications,

5 Taber and Escobar, close colleagues of many Anabaptist missiologists, were invited to contribute to the collection of essays produced by the Council of International Ministries called *A Relevant Anabaptist Missiology for the 1990s* (Council of International Ministries, 1990). Taber's piece, entitled "Sociocultural Comments on Mennonite Statements on Mission," appeared on pages 25–33, and Escobar's essay, "Present and Future Realities for Anabaptist Mission," is found on pages 35–41. In addition, Escobar wrote two essays where he discusses the importance of Anabaptist mission theology: "The Distinctive Traits of an Anabaptist Mission Theology," in *Collected Essays on Mission, Culture and Theology*, ed. Mark Greenwood (Fortress Press, 2022), 135–144; and "Latin America and Anabaptist Theology," in *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition*, ed. John D. Roth (Herald Press, 2001), 75–88.

possible deviations from our tradition, and what directions our theology should move in.

The Kingdom of God and Mission

Christians believe that the message of mission and the goal of mission is the coming kingdom of God. In recent years, *kingdom of God* is used more than the *church* in theologies of mission. What are the implications of this shift? How are we to understand Jesus and the kingdom? How do we understand the church in relation to the kingdom and the kingdom in relation to the world? There has been much confusion in the way in which the kingdom of God is used.

The kingdom of God is the rule of God. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom. In Jesus we have the proclamation and presence of the kingdom. The kingdom has a name and a face. There is no kingdom without the king—Jesus. Jesus’s words and works witnessed to the kingdom “at hand” (Matt 4:23, 9:35; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43). The kingdom is “now,” and the kingdom is “not yet”; the “now” points forward to the “not yet.” The kingdom came in Christ; it will come in fullness when Christ returns. Jesus spoke of the kingdom; the early Christians spoke of Jesus.

Jesus said believers were given the keys of the kingdom (Matt 16:19). He sent out the twelve and “gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal” (Luke 9:1, 2). When the seventy were sent out, they were to “heal the sick and say to them, the kingdom of God has come near you” (Luke 10:9). When kingdom is connected with mission, preaching, healing, and exorcism belong together.

The church is part of the kingdom movement. It is a sign and foretaste of the kingdom. The church does not embody the fullness of the kingdom but points to the kingdom. The church’s identity and role are in relation to the kingdom, but the church is penultimate. The kingdom is ultimate. The kingdom has begun to manifest itself in the church, though the church only partially and imperfectly models the kingdom. There is more to the kingdom. God’s kingdom is not the property of the church. The church is always judged by the kingdom of God. If the characteristics of the kingdom are not visible in the church, its witness is invalid. The world evaluates the kingdom based on what it sees in the church.

When Jesus told us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10), he implied that Christians could make a difference in the world. Jesus’s own modeling of the kingdom suggests that spiritual, ethical, and social concerns are also concerns of those who are kingdom citizens. Jesus invites us to join the kingdom through a new birth (John 3:5) and be his disciples, but he also shows us how discipleship bears fruit in compassionate ministries that point people toward the kingdom.

Those who do not come under the rule of God by following Jesus are part of a competing kingdom—the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of this world. They are lost and confused because they are under another’s rule.

The kingdom of God judges all other kingdoms. We participate with Christ in the ongoing struggle between God’s kingdom and the powers of darkness. Principalities and powers will eventually give way to this kingdom. The kingdom is in conflict with national security, the pride of ethnocentrism, and competing ideologies and religions.

At the same time, Christians confront other kingdoms with the radical claims of God’s kingdom. Without losing sight of the kingdom, we seek to identify with people in their struggles and work for more humaneness, yet never expecting to bring about a new social order known as the kingdom of God. We are not naive about utopian schemes for social order, because we know the power of sin. Changing society was not the primary goal of Anabaptists. No human effort can bring the kingdom of God. But the claims of God’s kingdom of righteousness, when witnessed to, can be signs of what God intends for the universe and an invitation for persons to join that kingdom. A theology of the kingdom demands that we think clearly about its implications:

1. The kingdom of God is the foundation for a more holistic view of mission. If God’s reign is concerned with all aspects of life, mission includes concern for both spiritual and material welfare. And the kingdom of God enables us to think more broadly than the mere privatization of faith. The kingdom is more than the inner rule of God in the moral and spiritual disposition of the soul. Kingdom helps us bring together God’s relationship to persons and society.
2. We must emphasize that one does not become a member of the kingdom by experiencing the signs. Liberation from oppression is not itself the door to the kingdom. The signs are designed to lead one to make a commitment to the king’s rule by receiving forgiveness and becoming a disciple.
3. While the kingdom and the church are not identical, they should not be separated. If the church is a messianic community, the presence and power of God’s rule must be seen in its life. Is the church credible and functioning as a sign? How will the kingdom of God as the final goal of history affect the church’s mission now?
4. We are often told to look at God’s activity in history and name him there. This can easily lead to a definition of the kingdom of God that is too wide. God’s presence in creation and in secular history (sovereignty) should not be confused with God’s presence in salvation history. God’s kingdom is more than God’s providence as expressed in love and righteousness. The kingdom should not be separated from God’s saving action, God’s rule over people’s lives.

5. The kingdom of God is not achieved through mere transformations in the historical process. Human history does not evolve into the kingdom of God. We do not introduce God's kingdom by our social programs. Secular movements may bring greater freedom and a fuller humanity, but the liberating rule of God in Christ is more than a humane sociopolitical program.
6. We must keep the message of the kingdom and the person of Jesus together. As Lesslie Newbigin said, "When the message of the kingdom is divorced from the Person of Jesus, it becomes a program or an ideology, but not a gospel."⁶

Christology and Mission

Our understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ is foundational to all mission theology. Such understanding will determine what kind of gospel we announce as we witness to the kingdom. Without Christ there is no Christian mission. Emphasis on the whole Christ leads to holism in mission. Too often in mission we have difficulty keeping the divine and human nature of Christ in balance (tension), so missionaries have tended to emphasize one or the other. Some focus on spiritual needs and others on physical needs.

But when we read the New Testament, we see a Christ who both saves from sin and shows solidarity with despairing humans. We see the earthly Jesus and the exalted Lord. Through Jesus Christ we are converted, justified, and transformed, and his life becomes a pattern for us as we become his obedient disciples. Christ incarnate and crucified becomes the model for mission. The cross is the means of our salvation and the model for our life. We should not prioritize aspects of Christ's life. Will we witness to the whole Christ or just the Christ that suits us?

A whole Christ offers comprehensive salvation. When people respond to the saving lordship of Jesus Christ, they experience personal transformation, but the impact of salvation extends beyond their personal transformation and personal relationships. Since sin erupts in antisocial behavior, salvation influences one's social behavior. Christians feel called to work for some degree of social transformation. They believe that the life and death of Jesus can effect change. To be sure, salvation is more than sociopolitical liberation or particular political programs, but those who follow Jesus place no limit on their compassion for people victimized by social sins..

Christians affirm that Christ is unique, decisive, and universally significant. He is the source of salvation. Salvation is not found in human goodness, other religions, ideologies, or political programs. Central to our understanding of salvation

6 Pulled from a longer sentence in Newbigin's *Sign of the Kingdom* (William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 18–19.

is the cross and the resurrection. It is “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). The cross is the basis of salvation. It revitalizes the church and sustains it under oppression; it is the model for discipleship and the paradigm for our engagement in the world. If we ignore the cross, we ignore Jesus of Nazareth.

The cross must be a way of life, not something to which we turn only in moments of particular need. The degree to which we die with Christ determines the degree to which we experience resurrection. We know, of course, that resurrection power is only a small measure of the coming final resurrection. Alister E. McGrath once noted that “the cross may ultimately defy explanation, but it certainly demands a response,”⁷ a thought further amplified by Lesslie Newbigin in saying, “The cross is not defeat reversed by the resurrection, but it is a victory proclaimed by the resurrection.”⁸

The cross is not simply an idea; it focuses on the person and action of Jesus. From the perspective of Jesus’s cross-life we turn toward the sin and suffering of the world. In the face of the powers of this world we wonder if we can accomplish anything, but it is then that the cross and resurrection give us a clue. As H. A. Williams said, “The background of Resurrection is always impossibility. . . . Resurrection is always the defiance of the absurd.”⁹

In relation to Christology, there are several issues that need further clarification in our witness. The issue of the whole Christ offering comprehensive salvation will be discussed later, as will the significance of the cross. In addition to these issues, careful thought must be given to the following:

1. There are many different Christian interpretations of Jesus Christ. We recognize that there is not a single model for interpreting Jesus in the New Testament, because the message of Jesus is contextualized in differing cultures to address specific needs. But this can be abused. For example, some Christians emphasize the Synoptic Gospels and not the Johannine literature or Paul’s epistles, and other Christians do just the opposite. The Synoptic Gospels, which describe Jesus’s life and ministry, are used to speak mainly of the humanity of Jesus, whereas Paul and John’s writings focus more on Christ’s divine lordship and his provision of salvation. The Synoptic Gospels are said to have a “low” Christology and Paul and John’s writings a “high” Christology. Can we let our witness to Christ be informed by the full range of views of Christ in scripture?

7 Alister E. McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross* (Academie Books, 1988), 188–189.

8 Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 127.

9 Two sentences pulled from a longer statement in H. A. Williams, *True Resurrection* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 57.

2. In some circles there is a tendency to speak more of the Cosmic Christ (John 1:1–18; Col 1:15–20) than of the incarnate and crucified Christ. Christ, it is asserted, is not only the head of the church but also of the cosmos. The Cosmic Christ is said to be at work in the best of other religions or in liberating sociopolitical movements. We are asked to concentrate on how all things are being united in him in the face of the pluralisms of our time (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20). We don't deny that Christ is head of the church and cosmos, but only in the church is his headship recognized. By what criteria do we discern when we have found Christ in the cosmos? Let us never separate the Cosmic Christ from the incarnate and crucified Christ. They are held together in John 1:1–18 and Col 1:15–20. The Cosmic Christ does not work inconsistently with Jesus of Nazareth. The incarnate Christ (Jesus) interprets the Cosmic Christ, not the other way around.
3. It is important to understand Christology in relation to Trinity. Mission is rooted in the triune being of God. If any of the persons of the Trinity are taken in isolation, the meaning of mission is distorted. Lesslie Newbigin insists that we recover the Trinity and participate in the work of the triune God. Trinitarian theology is the only way to have a whole monotheism. Neglect of the Trinity leads to theocentric understandings that minimize Jesus.¹⁰ In an effort to be more accepting of religious pluralism, some have contended that Christocentrism is a stumbling block and that we need to move to theocentrism. It is suggested that if all people focus on God, we can have a “Copernican Revolution” and be more accepting of one another because all religions are then equal. But what kind of theocentrism do we have if Christological understandings are diminished? God is revealed in Christ and deals with the world through Christ. A theocentrism that marginalizes Christ cuts the heart out of mission.
4. An opposite and equal danger arises when we develop a Christomonism that speaks only or primarily of Jesus Christ with little reference to the Father or the Spirit. This can be an impediment in witness to Jews and Muslims, in particular, because their belief that Christians worship more than one God seems to be confirmed.

The Holy Spirit and Mission

A trinitarian understanding of mission requires an adequate doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The church was drawn together by the Spirit at Pentecost and launched on

¹⁰ For more on Newbigin's view of the Trinity, see *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (William B Eerdmans, 1995), esp. chapter 3 (pp. 19–29) and page 65.

its mission by the Spirit (Acts). It's the Spirit who calls to mission, enables mission, and prepares the way for mission. The Spirit converts, equips the church with gifts, guides the church into truth, and sanctifies in holiness. The Spirit is the pledge and guarantee of our kingdom inheritance (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14). The Spirit guides and goes before the church. Since the Spirit is sovereign over mission, the church must follow where the Spirit leads. Mission is not what the church does, but what the Spirit does.

Spirituality for mission comes by revitalization from the Spirit. We need to depend upon the Spirit to touch people. The Spirit draws people from unbelief to belief and responds to human hungers. The Spirit convicts of sin, draws to Christ, and transforms lives in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. As we "walk in the Spirit" we are changed radically. But without the tenderness of the Spirit, radical Christian faith either cannot be maintained or becomes harsh. Only the Spirit produces the sensitivity that recommends radical faith. We can only be confident and hopeful as we trust the Spirit's work to compensate for our weakness. The church has been faithful in the midst of opposition and persecution by the enabling Spirit. Many signs and wonders testify to the work of the Spirit in encounter with kingdoms that are in conflict with God's kingdom. The Spirit penetrates and dethrones alien spiritual realities.

Mennonites often fail to recognize the importance of the work of the Spirit in the Anabaptist movement. Anabaptism then becomes an ideology. Sometimes the work of the Spirit becomes routinized or institutionalized, maybe even predictable but lacking power. The forms are frozen and the life is gone. Yet the Spirit can subvert our plans. Do we welcome what Wilbert Shenk calls the "subversion of the Spirit"? Renewal often comes at the margins; the Spirit works at the creative edges. The two-thirds world is frequently more open to the surprise of the Spirit, perhaps because there is more dependence or emphasis on the movement of the Spirit than on the church as an institution.

Going forward, the church will face crucial issues in relation to the theology of the Holy Spirit and mission. These issues include the following:

5. We have become increasingly aware of the need for spirituality in mission. There are spiritual dimensions to evangelism, church formation, and ministries of social action. The charismatic movement is one response to this felt need. We have learned anew to be open to the surprise of the Spirit and the subversion of the Spirit. But sometimes there have been unnecessary "schisms" of the Spirit! We need a theology of the Spirit that does not lead to schism in the body. We need to be more open to charismatic expressions but broaden the meaning of *charismatic* if we are to be faithful to the whole New Testament. *Charismatic* has been too narrowly defined when a particular definition has been used as the norm for evaluating other legitimate expressions. More at-

- tention will need to be given to the relationship of spiritual renewal and radical faith. Can Anabaptists help to bridge this gap?
6. Power evangelism has recently established itself in our theological vocabulary. Often the church was more “truth conscious” than “power conscious.” We had message centeredness but saw little power encounter. Signs and wonders, healings and exorcisms are a needed corrective to this imbalance. We have come to understand anew the Spirit’s confrontation with demonic personalities and structures. We have learned not to underestimate the power of evil in confrontation with the kingdom of God, because when God’s kingdom is present evil raises its head in new ways. But when we emphasize power, new temptations lurk close by.
 7. We can be overconfident in predicting the power of the Spirit or diminish the surprise of the Spirit by institutionalizing the forms of power. Do we unknowingly seek to coerce the Spirit? Do we want to be in control instead of submitting to God? If the kingdom is “now” but “not yet,” are we to expect “now” all the manifestations of power that Jesus experienced? We can expect too little or too much from the Spirit. The *Manila Manifesto* strikes a helpful note when it suggests that “We reject skepticism which denies miracles and the presumption which demands them, both the timidity which shrinks from the fullness of the Spirit and the triumphalism which shrinks from the weakness in which Christ’s power is made perfect.”¹¹ We should not deny miracles nor demand them. We need to live with expectancy and openness to God’s surprise, always trusting God’s sovereignty. Let’s remember also that there are multiple kinds of power—the power of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of ethics, of suffering. Very little is heard of suffering in many power theologies.
 8. Power encounter is frequently spoken of in terms of “spiritual warfare.” Spiritual warfare takes place when the Spirit confronts principalities and powers and when we put on the armor of God against such powers (Eph 6). But when we speak of warfare, a measure of humility is required. We are not so self-confident that we can “name it and claim it.” We too often seek immediate results. If we know that Jesus is greater than all other powers, we can *trust* the Spirit of Jesus. Without trust, warfare can lead to arrogance. Unless our spirit is sensitized by the Spirit of God, we can so easily regard the non-Christian as the enemy. All spiritual warfare must be tempered by the cross and sacrificial love, or it becomes a triumphalist program that is counter to the kingdom.

11 *The Manila Manifesto: An Elaboration of The Lausanne Covenant Fifteen Years Later* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1989), 18.

9. There are theologies of the Spirit that suggest our primary task is to identify where the Spirit is working in the world, particularly in life-giving elements of religious or political systems. It is said that the Spirit is at work in ways that surpass human understanding. The inference is that such work of the Spirit is not confined to our understanding of the work of Christ. Since the Spirit is at work everywhere, we are told to join with the Spirit in missions and de-emphasize preaching, evangelism, and nurturing the church.
10. We are confident that the Spirit goes before us into mission and leads us into mission. Of course, there is much about the Spirit's work that we do not fully grasp, but we can be sure that the Spirit sent by the Father is eager to bear witness to the Father's revelation in the Son. According to the New Testament, the Spirit makes the person and work of Christ present in the world. The Spirit magnifies Christ by bringing to the knowledge of all people what God has done in Christ. The Spirit does not supersede Christ. Rather, the mission of the Son continues in the mission of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is complementary to that of Christ, not an adversary that competes with Christ by bringing another agenda. When the Spirit moves before us in witness, we should expect to see the Spirit working in surprising ways, but this should invite us to witness to the fullness in Christ, not preclude such witness. We need to discern where the Spirit is working and exalt the person of Christ. Indeed, it is in witnessing to Christ that we often discover where the Spirit is working. A trinitarian understanding of mission helps us discern where the Spirit is working and where there are movements that must be rejected because the spirit is anti-Christ. We do not define Christ on the basis of the presumed workings of the Spirit. Our Christology determines what is truly of the Spirit.
11. While remaining open to the mysterious workings of the Spirit, let us not separate the Spirit from the Trinity. Perhaps the Cornelius experience (Acts 10) can be a trinitarian model for mission. Cornelius had awareness of God, and he was moved by the Spirit, but he needed to hear Peter declare the message of Christ to come to a full understanding of salvation. The responsibility of the Peters may be a more important question than knowing precisely how and where the Spirit is at work.

The Church and Mission

Anabaptists believe the church is at the center of mission and that mission is central to the nature of the church. The church is a foretaste, a sign and exhibit of the kingdom. A church that is not a sign of the kingdom is a countersign to the kingdom. The church is the body of Christ, the people of God, a community

of believers. A believers' church witnesses to people that they might believe. Believers are not detached individuals; the gospel creates churches, not just new individuals. We reject the idea that one can believe in Christ and not believe in the church.

The primary manifestation of Christ is in the community. We don't deny Christ's sovereign power in history, but the focal point of his action is in the church. We must emphasize the church as the corporate embodiment of salvation. A new quality of whole life in Christ is attractive when it is embodied in the church. The being of the church is crucial. A reconciled fellowship is part of the good news.

The church is more than a platform or tool for achieving something else. Liberals use the church for social action and evangelicals use the church for evangelism. But the new social reality is itself a challenge for individuals and societies to be transformed.

H. W. Gensichen spoke of the two aspects of mission as "dimension" and "intention."¹² The dimensional quality (being) of the church as community must precede intention (witness beyond); intention can only exist and be sustained on the basis of dimension. This requires dynamic interaction between dimension and intention so that the church, which is the product of mission, is also the instrument for mission. The church is the center of God's agenda for redemption. The church is a community in mission, a movement more than an institution. The church is in mission by its very nature, not just on the basis of some specific texts. If a church is not a sending church, it is not the church of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism calls people to a radically new community. It is concerned that a peoplehood be formed, not just that individuals assent to Christ. That peoplehood will not be a perfect community. Indeed, it is often a failing community, but it is a community that has learned to depend upon grace and forgiveness. Evangelism calls people to discipleship within community. The church as community will differ from place to place, from society to society, and from culture to culture.

God works through the church in the world. This church-centered approach holds that the church, not the world, is the locus of God's mission, that it is primarily the church that sets the agenda, not the world. The church lives in solidarity with all humankind and serves in the world, but it cannot lose sight of the lostness, fallenness, and evil of the world. This division between the church and the world must never be erased. David Bosch argues that the church "can only be meaningfully apostolic if her being-in-the-world is at the same time a being-different-in-the-world."

Church-centered mission believes that every congregation should be an instrument for mission. If the church is the bearer of mission, this means that the local

12 We were unable to locate the source of this assertion.

church must be taken more seriously. Individuals or mission agencies may not be “freelancers” who ignore or compete with the local church. Local church structures will need to be flexible, as is demanded by the character of God’s own action in the world. Churches will adapt to the local life of each area while retaining the true marks of the church.

But our doctrine of the church also transcends localism—regional, ethnic, or national. The new identity in Christ transcends all other identities. If the church is a foretaste of the kingdom of God, it is intercultural and international, as is the kingdom. Christ’s lordship is international, and the gospel is cross-cultural. When the church discovers its missionary nature, it also discovers its oneness in faith, life, and mission. David Bosch suggests that “there is a dynamic relationship between mission and unity . . . it is impossible to choose in favor of either mission or unity. The only possibility for the church is either for or against both.”¹³

Mission belongs to the whole church. Many churches no longer see themselves as objects of mission but as agents of mission in their own right. They want church-to-church relationships rather than the old bilateral links to mission agencies. We need to move away from former understandings such as donors and receivers, senders and receivers, older and younger.

We must think in terms of mutuality, reciprocity, interdependence, co-responsibility, and equal partnership. When we respect each other as equals, we are able to maintain self-respect. We are a worldwide family of God, a worldwide community of discernment. We need to listen to one another and help each other understand the meaning of discipleship. The insight of every community should be shared with the total peoplehood. As mutual partners we challenge, correct, inspire, enrich, and support one another. If we compete with each other or ignore each other, we fracture mission. When we are paternalistic, we fail in love and mission is obscured. As Charles Williams said, “One cannot love downwards. One cannot love when one thinks oneself superior.”¹⁴

Mutual sharing of gifts can enable us to act more confidently, decisively, and wisely. The gifts of human and spiritual resources are more important than material resources. We in the West need self-emptying so that we can receive from others the wealth of their spiritual resources. Mutuality can lead to new and creative ventures in mission. Mission may still be primarily the responsibility of the local church in each place, but when we unite our efforts there can be an

13 We were unable to locate the exact source of this and the previous statement attributed to Bosch.

14 The full quote by Charles Williams here is, “One cannot love downwards, *de haut en bas*. That is reserved to God. One cannot love when one thinks oneself superior—even if one is superior,” from “Antichrist and the City’s Laws,” in *The Image of the City and Other Essays*, selected by Anne Ridler (Oxford University Press, 1958), 120.

even fuller witness to the kingdom of God. These understandings of the church should have an impact upon our theology in several ways:

1. Anabaptists have emphasized the church as community. The “dimensional” character of the church has received a lot of focus. As we appropriate mission methodologies from whatever source, let us make sure they reinforce the role of community in mission. We may be disillusioned with certain forms of community, and we should acknowledge that communal forms change from decade to decade and from society to society, but what are those “dimensions” that transcend cultures and invite people to faith? What kind of church participates in the mission of God?
2. Anabaptists believe that one is called to a life of radical discipleship in community. In much of our history we have found it difficult, however, to be intentional about mission. Others have helped us to catch a vision for mission beyond ourselves. In that process we have been eclectic in the choice of mission strategies. It is important that we continually evaluate our mission theories and methodologies in terms of what they produce. Are they in conflict with our theology of the church? Are they producing disciples? Do they lead to the church? Are they mainly individual-centered or church-centered? North American Mennonites might inadvertently compromise their ecclesiology for “engineering techniques,” which tend too easily to manipulate, calculate, program, or quantify. Numerical success must never be pursued at the expense of ethical concern and other aspects of integral growth.
3. The new community breaks down the old “walls of partition” that are antithetical to life in the kingdom of God. How can we develop methodologies and structures that transcend rather than perpetuate ethnicity, race, and nation? Does our theology prepare the way for mutuality, or is our practice ahead of our theology? What structures facilitate spiritual unity?
4. When we are part of the kingdom of God we are committed to a worldwide fellowship. One-way mission is over. But how can we, from the North and West, balance ecumenism and missionary initiative at the same time? How can we move toward a fuller understanding of global mission? What is the shape of mission in the framework of interdependence? The call for self-reliance, cultural identity, and re-adjusted relationships should lead to power sharing and new structures but not to the demise of mission.

Holistic Mission

Holism in mission is reinforced when mission arises out of the kingdom of God and the whole Christ. Anabaptists believe that salvation is through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. This is good news—the gospel. Anabaptists also believe that one needs to follow Jesus. This is also gospel. Discipleship is obeying the demands of the gospel. One can't separate conversion from obedience. If Christ is in one's heart, he must also be in one's daily life. We seek to follow the message and example of Jesus.

The cross not only provides atonement but becomes the model for our life—our personal lifestyle and our engagement in the world. Ethics, radical discipleship, and holiness are not elective elements but essential to faith. If the cross is central to our theology, we must be marked by the cross. We are called to participate with Christ, not merely to imitate him. Christian faith is more than a truth to be accepted or an ethic to follow; it is to be in relationship with Christ. Mission is calling people to faith in Jesus Christ—a faith that involves conversion and a radical commitment to follow Jesus.

From the Gospels we receive a vision of the kingdom of God that helps to keep the word of the gospel and the deed of the gospel together. Jesus preached and healed and commissioned his disciples to follow the same pattern. Words and deeds both announced the kingdom. When one sees the gospel in terms of the totality of Jesus's ministry, it is impossible to discern any tension between word and deed in his life.

Jesus's life is characterized by compassion and service. He “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Matthew reports that “when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” and that Jesus told his disciples to pray for laborers for the plentiful harvest (Matt 9:36). Later Matthew records, “As he went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matt 14:14). Here concern for harvest and concern for sick both elicit Jesus's compassion. To see need, whether spiritual or physical, and not respond compassionately is unbelief. The opposite of compassion is indifference or aloofness. Jesus's story of the Good Samaritan shows the contrasts between compassion and indifference.

The gospel lacks visibility and credibility if we merely speak it or express interest in the soul with no regard for the needs of the body in specific physical or social situations. But it is not fully authentic if we act responsibly but deny the validity of words in calling people to conversion. Love expresses itself wherever there is need. Love responds when people fall among robbers, and love responds to loss when people seek meaning in life. It would be a failure of love not to invite people to find meaning in discipleship and a failure of love to ignore human need. We are sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world (John 17:18, 20:21). Jesus came with words and deeds. He invited people to follow him as disciples.

We are eager to make disciples of all nations. He fed the hungry, washed dirty feet, healed the sick, comforted the depressed. We make every effort to minister to the brokenness of our world.

In Acts there is a rhythm of word, presence of the Christian community, and action. This pattern is established in chapters 2, 3, and 4. Peter preached at Pentecost, a community was formed, Peter and John were led outside the community to heal one who suffered, and this was followed by a confrontation with the powers. Subsequent chapters of Acts illustrate the rhythm of word and deed in the context of Christian community. Words and signs were part of Philip's ministry in Samaria (8:5–8). Peter was involved in healing and a raising from death at Lydda and Joppa, which caused many to believe (9:32–42). At Lystra Paul and Barnabas were instruments of healing for a crippled person and called upon the crowds to turn to the living God (14:8–18). At Philippi a girl was released from an evil spirit, and people were called to believe in the Lord (16:16–34). At Ephesus there were sermons, healings, and exorcisms (19:8–17).

At their best, Anabaptists have held to a holistic theology of mission, but we sometimes succumb to a dualism that divides soul and body, spiritual and material, heaven and earth, faith and works. This creates confusion and lack of clear purpose, which in turn causes us to define the gospel too narrowly. What we need is a larger view, a vision of the kingdom. Fullness of mission is something we have understood, and we should not let other people's agendas confuse us. Our task is to witness to the kingdom with words and deeds, remembering that it is not we who inaugurate the kingdom. As David Bosch said, "The light people see is not the light coming from the lantern we carry in our hands in the dark; it is the glow on our faces which reflects the approaching dawn."¹⁵

As citizens of the kingdom, we are willing to do whatever that citizenship leads us to do. We proclaim the kingdom by confronting the world with God's call to salvation in Christ. We wish that all would come to know Jesus as Savior and experience forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation with God. We hope that spiritual hunger will be satisfied with the Bread of Life. We do not forget the transcendent dimensions of personhood.

But as citizens of the kingdom, we are also concerned that the preaching of the gospel not be separated from acts that witness to the kingdom. We who are justified are concerned about justice because the God who justifies us in Christ calls us to do justice. Acts of liberation point to the fullness of liberation to come. They help us understand what salvation can be like, but they are not the whole of salvation. God's kingdom is a kingdom of justice and peace. When we act justly it is a sign of God's kingdom. We believe in human dignity regardless of an individual's faith commitment. We offer the Bread of Life, but also bread. Good news and good works are inseparable.

15 We are uncertain about the exact location of this statement.

Christians do not reject the world; they participate in the world's suffering and struggle. Christian marginality is ghetto-like if there is no solidarity with people. There needs to be a marriage of religious experience and social dynamism. Crucial to our understanding of holistic mission is our theological diagnosis of the world and our theology of salvation. How comprehensive is sin and how comprehensive is salvation? The gospel has social implications, even if social action is not to Christianize society or effect the kingdom of God. Changing political and economic structures to bring about justice is important, but that is only partial. We are also eager for people to be converted to the "kingdom of justice."

One of the failures of contemporary witness is that word and deed have been separated. Instead of having a whole we have divided it into parcels. We then try to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials. But mission cannot be explained under only one category if we take seriously word and deed in Jesus' announcement of the kingdom or the example of the early church.

Theories about the relationship of word and deed provide helpful perspectives but are faulty when understood as formulas or norms. We know that we must become good news before we share good news, that we must love the neighbor before we win the neighbor, that witness of life is the most effective vehicle for the gospel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right when he said that it was not abstract argument but concrete example that gives power to the church's word.¹⁶ When word is wedded to deed both are enriched and enhanced. Deeds and words interpret each other. Integrity demands that we keep them together. We need a renewed commitment to the gospel in every part of life. Faith without works is dead, but works without faith suffers from the lack of nourishment that sustains them. Those who work seriously at keeping word and deed together will attract the attention of the world. If we are to continue to practice holistic mission, there are important areas that need our attention:

1. It is clear that deed and word are not the same. Reconciliation between humans is not reconciliation with God, social action is not evangelism, political liberation is not full salvation. But word also does not automatically save. Deed and word point to the one who saves. Deed and word are distinct, but they must be inseparably bound together. We must not confuse them in definition or separate them in practice. An incarnational theology helps us maintain this balance. When we separate the two, we are reductionist and make either one a whole by itself, or we develop priorities that become rivals competing for supremacy. Mission is not just deed, one-dimensional telling, confrontation of

16 The exact quote from Bonhoeffer is, "The church's word gains weight and power not through concepts but by example," from "Outline of a Book, Tegel, August 1944," in *Letters and Papers from Prison: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 8, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Augsburg Press, 2010), 504.

- power, Christian community, or church growth. It is doing, telling, confronting, nurturing, and growing.
2. We must avoid attempts to prioritize aspects of the gospel. Let us talk about the *priority of the gospel* in all its aspects. Is feeding the hungry “gospel,” or is it charity that prepares the way for the “gospel?” Some argue for the primacy of “pure evangelism.” Is it not more important to work at an integral relationship between social action and evangelism? Lausanne II at Manila spoke of “Word and Deed,”¹⁷ and the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism at San Antonio spoke of “Deed and Word.”¹⁸ Is a different order of priority implied?
 3. While we reject attempts to set one dimension in priority over the other in the abstract, we do develop priorities on the basis of specific situations, and witness is diversified according to the gifts of people. The Good Samaritan did not preach to his victim. Neither did Philip offer the Ethiopian medical care. Sometimes actions are called for. Other times words are essential.
 4. A challenge to contemporary Anabaptists is to keep word and deed together in practice. This is consistent with our theology. When we separate the two or minimize either, we are borrowing agenda from other theological traditions. The danger for us is to make either one a whole by itself. Some among us emphasize word almost to the exclusion of deed, and others stress deeds and seem to neglect word. Each exclusion is equally unbiblical. We need to encourage greater cooperation between our agencies when possible so that present structures do not present a dichotomy inconsistent with our theology.
 5. We must symbolize our commitment to word and deed by the way we allocate resources. We should work for balance in the commitment of financial resources and call out the gifts of people for both. We need greater affirmation for the gifts of each other. It is unchristian either to devalue or deny the validity of the gift and ministry of the other. Given the specialization of our culture, some institutions and persons will engage primarily in deed and others will be concerned for word. We

17 Pulled from a longer statement in *The Manila Manifesto: An Elaboration of The Lausanne Covenant Fifteen Years Later* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1989), 12.

18 The full quote here is, “To those who hear or experience a twisted or partial gospel, or no gospel at all: Mission in Christ’s Way calls us by deed and word to share the wholeness of the gospel, the love of God revealed in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ,” in *The San Antonio Report: Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ’s Way*, ed. Frederick R. Wilson, World Council of Churches (WCC Publications, 1990), 23.

cannot *all* do everything. But we can affirm each other in our respective tasks so that the impact of the body's unity is more apparent. Unfortunately, it is much easier to stereotype one another or ask, "Who is the greatest?"

6. Because of cultural and religious pluralism, deed is more acceptable in certain places in the world than word. Therefore, we must insist that word is not minimized. It is sometimes easier to hear the "cry of the poor" than the "cry of the lost." We may feel more comfortable speaking to the "sinned against" than to "sinners." But we must not distort any aspect of the finality of Christ's lordship. If we are easily calloused in not hearing the "cry of the poor," we are equally insensitive if we do not hear the "cry of the lost."
7. We need to clarify what we expect to accomplish from action. Here there is a lot of confusion. Some wonder why we seek to perfect the world if it is not really perfectible. Why get involved in that which is doomed for destruction? Others seem to act as though the Sermon on the Mount were addressed to the world's structures. Confusion in relation to this issue has frequently led to discordant notes in both action and word. Word and deed announce the kingdom. When kingdom values are lived in the world there are social consequences that impact the structures, but they are an invitation to become part of the kingdom, not a crusade for a new form of Christendom. The church cannot "right" all of history, but it can witness to grace and justice, which challenges injustice. We should not expect too much from our actions. We witness to the kingdom, and this gives us hope. If we focus on our achievements, we soon despair.
8. For some Mennonites action is easier than word. They are strong on deeds but reluctant to speak. Some even question whether speaking is part of our role as Christians. They feel drawn to a silent witness. Radical Christians often have difficulty verbalizing their faith. Have we over-emphasized the need to behave well so people will "see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven?" Or perhaps we rightly criticize some forms and manner of words as inauthentic. We may have a bias toward deeds in order to balance out "word-oriented" Christians. We may seek to counter an over-emphasis on orthodoxy with orthopraxy (living ethically) so that we do not cheapen words, but our hesitancy to speak may also reflect uncertainty about the message or equivocation about who Jesus is. We wonder if conversion is necessary. Jesus offers us a word of forgiveness and a model for reconciling action. He justifies us and leads us to acts of justice. When we understand who he is, word and action flow naturally together.

9. The poor are sometimes considered the new “missionary yardstick” (Emilio Castro). In the years ahead more attention must be given to the poor. Our response to the poor will determine the credibility of our theology of mission. The whole Bible is clear in its empathy for the poor; God has a particular concern for the poor. We need to show compassion for the poor without pushing the rich beyond the reach of God’s grace. Christians must respond to the poor whether we bear some personal responsibility for their state of poverty or are free from such guilt. Identification with the poor is not an option; it is imperative.
10. Poverty itself is not a virtue unless it is voluntarily chosen. We should not idealize the state of poverty or sacralize the poor as though they need no salvation. The poor are not saved because they are poor. It is not enough to identify with the poor simply because they appear to be more open to the gospel, for once again the poor become objects. How can we learn from the poor new understandings of the gospel? How does one help the poor without demeaning them? How can one be an advocate? If we are to empower the poor and help them recover their dignity, we must communicate in love and humility. This cannot happen without our lifestyles being affected. Christ not only loved the poor, he became poor.
11. We have seen a shift in the church’s attitude in recent years. We used to speak of simple living and downward mobility. Now we talk about empowering the poor, but we retain our comfortable lifestyle of wealth, power, and status. “Simple living” has passed as simply another fad, but we are “poorer” for it! Are we not called upon to sacrifice some of the privileges of our social class for the sake of the poor? Our theology will not be sustainable unless we concretize our compassion for the poor in costly and specific practice.
12. We need to give more attention to the theological rootage of our social concern. How does Christian action differ from other action? We may never marry our social concern to one ideological position. Liberation, justice, human rights, and peace can easily be co-opted by ideological systems. God’s justice can never be identified with the position of a particular political cause, nor can we completely identify with the cause of the oppressed. Human understanding of justice is always relative, ambiguous, and flawed by fallenness. Causes for justice can be fraught with self-righteousness and self-interest. Concern for human rights can degenerate into insistence on “my rights.” When the church promotes the values of the kingdom in sociopolitical processes, it is not a political party. It is concerned for morality, not partisan politics.

13. God's justice judges all human understandings of justice. Oppressed and oppressor must be called to consider Jesus. Our commitment is not to a program but to Jesus. There is a difference between commitment to a cause and commitment to a person. Causes become ideological. Christian acts of liberation point to the Liberator, justice to the Just One.
14. There are many pacificisms, but Christian pacifism is rooted in Jesus. Concern for creation cannot be divorced from the Creator. It is important that we examine more carefully the relationship between salvation in Christ and our particular concerns and avoid one-sided interpretations of liberation, righteousness, justice, justification, and shalom. Greater awareness of our theological rootage will give us discernment in determining what social, economic, and political tools we can use. Beyond that we have the weapons of faith, the power of the cross.
15. Careful thought should be given to a spirituality for peace and justice. Holistic mission must be concerned for a holistic peace—personal life, congregational life, social life—and in that order. We need to work at our own unresolved conflicts and the “burnout” we experience in action. Christians need a spiritual basis for action that grows out of the presence of God's Spirit. As Arnold Snyder asked, “Do we have a spirituality of non-violence or just an ethic?”¹⁹ He said theology can lead one to work for peace and justice, but it does not help one love the enemy if spiritual resources are lacking. Snyder's probing must be taken seriously, for words and deeds are only authentic as they are empowered by the Spirit. They must emerge from the context of one's spiritual journey and from the worshiping community. Without the nurturing and leading of the Spirit we burn out and our witness dissipates.

Incarnation and Mission

Incarnation is foundational to all mission. Incarnation emphasizes the importance of embodying the divine presence, embodying the gospel. Christians not only have a message for the world but are concerned for a way of life. An incarnational presence helps us not to dichotomize between word and deed. We do not have a disembodied spirituality. We believe that the church is Christ's body in the world and that Christians individually and corporately identify with the human situation. Faith is human-centered because it is God-centered. Witness is never in a vacuum. Incarnation has as its model the incarnate, *kenotic* Christ (Phil 2:1–11).

19 We were unable to identify the exact location of this statement.

Incarnation presupposes a lifestyle of vulnerability and servanthood. This has been an important dimension of an Anabaptist understanding of mission. As Christ modeled self-emptying, we are called to downward mobility instead of mere self-fulfillment. We need to be truly present in people's lives. Passivity must give way to involvement and solidarity. We speak and act from the ground level, not from the top down.

We are not always strong; we cannot have inevitable success. When we are strong, we are dangerous and least effective; we often distort the gospel. Israel was more successful when it was weak; Israel in exile became more missionary. When we are weak—emptied of self—God can use us. We cannot make history come out right; that is in the hands of God. We more often feel like we are “crying in the wilderness.” We do not coerce people into the kingdom; we can only appeal to them. Let us not forget that the early church was a church of the catacombs rather than a church of power. Triumphalism gives way as we identify with the sufferings of Christ. How can we balance powerlessness with the power of the Spirit?

Incarnation is concerned for contextualizing the gospel in the lives of individuals, in local forms of the church, and in specific cultures. Without contextualization in a culture, we live in a ghetto. Theologies will be specific to language, worldview, and cultures. Our faith must be at home in every culture yet not identical with the cultural context. The universality of the gospel must also be maintained, but it is universally valid only as it is particular.

How can we be a remnant on the margin, a diaspora without being a caste (Andrew Walls)? We resist being a caste, yet we must not conform to culture to the extent that we no longer hear God's critique of culture. In both cases we fail to understand adequately the relationship between gospel and culture. The tension between gospel and culture must be maintained, or culture will disfigure the gospel. We want to express faith in the symbols and images of the local culture so that the gospel is illuminated, not betrayed. Since cultures change, the process of contextualization must be ongoing, not just one-time. We need to give more attention to both the anthropological and the prophetic roles of the church. Anabaptists have understood that there needs to be a prophetic word to culture, that the gospel transforms, that the church is counter-cultural.

As people from the West, we are often not open to insights from other cultures, particularly when they challenge our own cultural biases. We speak of the richness that comes to us from other cultures, but we resist change when there is critique of our syncretistic cultural understandings. We are discovering that contextualization of the gospel in the West is becoming more important and that we have done this inadequately.

Incarnation cannot be separated from the cross. If this was true of Christ, it was also true of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. Suffering love is the essence of the cross. Disciples share in Christ's suffering; they take up the cross to follow. Only as we identify with the suffering Jesus can we have meaningful

solidarity with a suffering church. In many parts of the world the church is facing opposition from ideologies, religions, economic systems, and demonic personalities and structures. While there seems to be a movement toward more freedom in some regions, much suffering remains in other parts of the world. Churches that Western initiatives have helped to birth can teach us much about suffering. In the coming years, we will need to explore in greater depth the meaning of incarnation in several respects:

1. Anabaptist-Mennonites have emphasized a style of mission, not just ideas or doctrine. Phil 2:1–11 is a crucial part of our theology. With our growing wealth, power, and sophistication, can our theology and lifestyle continue to be shaped by embodiment, vulnerability, servanthood, self-emptying, weakness, and the cross?
2. We will be called in new ways to express solidarity with all people, not just believers. Unconditional love to those who do not follow Christ is a significant witness. Special attention will need to be given to the most destitute.
3. If the church is indeed universal, we will need to find ways to participate in the struggles and suffering of the whole church in the whole world. We need first of all to learn from those who suffer and then encourage them or initiate action when appropriate. But our solidarity will be hollow unless we develop an appropriate lifestyle that identifies us with a suffering church.
4. Suffering is not a common theme in missiological literature or in theories of church growth. Anabaptists have a theology of suffering, but it needs to be restated in the face of current suffering. Can our theology of suffering be informed by the early church, our Anabaptist experience, and the suffering church with whom we partner? Martyr and witness, both etymologically and in action, are bound together in the New Testament. We tend to think that whenever there are successful movements, God is at work in the world. But we frequently misread the situation. God often works more in weakness, suffering, and persecution. Suffering gives credence to words and actions. Suffering has led to church renewal and more effective evangelism. The miracle of the church's revival and growth when persecuted makes it impossible not to believe in the resurrection.
5. A theology of suffering will need to include a spirituality for suffering. Here we must learn from those in the midst of suffering. Suffering should not lead to timidity or triumphalism. Timidity minimizes the presence of God, but triumphalism ignores the fact that Christ's power is manifest in weakness. Believers need wisdom, grace, courage, hope, and confidence that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church.

Theology of Religions for Mission

The relationship of Christian faith to other religions is one of the most important issues in theology and missiology. Other religions have not collapsed, as was earlier anticipated. Indeed, there has been a resurgence of the world's religions. Some of them have become missionary, and some seek to prevent further conversion from their ranks or to win back those who converted to Christian faith. Through mission engagements we have become more aware of other religions and have discovered that many of their adherents are good people. Their behavior can even be an implicit rebuke of us. We regret our limited understanding and arrogance, which expressed itself in triumphalism.

We know that we need to witness in an increasingly pluralistic world. But in the face of religious pluralism and relativism, and with guilt for past mistakes, we sometimes equivocate in our conviction about the truth of Christian faith and the missionary character of the church. This calls for courageous thinking about a theology of religions for mission.

In the history of Christian theology of religions three major positions were developed: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. *Exclusivism* holds that Jesus is the full and final revelation of God and is the only way, truth, and life. *Inclusivism* regards Christ as the unique revelation of God and as the only savior but acknowledges the possibility of salvation outside of Christian faith or beyond the walls of the visible church. But the agent of such salvation is Christ and the revelation in Jesus is normative for assessing such salvation. Jesus Christ is believed to be the center, and other ways are evaluated by how they relate to him. *Pluralism* denies any uniqueness for Jesus. Jesus is no longer central or normative. Christian faith is not truer than any other religion.

Religious pluralism is supported theologically on several grounds. Some have suggested that Christ-centeredness (*Christocentrism*) should be replaced by God-centeredness (*theocentrism*) and believe that Jesus himself models that by speaking of the kingdom of God. A few have moved beyond this to salvation-centeredness (*soteriocentrism*) because of the common quest for salvation. Others emphasize the Trinity as the foundation for pluralism, arguing that the Spirit is free to be present anywhere. Still others believe God is expressed differently in different religious traditions and argue that there are even differences within the Godhead. Some religious pluralism denies that God can be identified with any specific name, form, image, or story. Since there is no objective reality to provide the center, the only center is religious experience.

Religious pluralism does not entirely remove Christ from the equation. Some want to hold to Christ without holding to exclusiveness by suggesting that Jesus is no longer the final revelation or norm but is decisive and normative for Christians. For those outside the Christian tradition his revelation is relative. Christ is then the "pioneer" who is moved from the center to the "leading edge" of the religious

quest. Or Christ becomes a prophet, a guru, an emanation from God, a spirit master, a Christ idea, or a mythic figure.

Proponents of religious pluralism believe there are many paths to God. All religions are equally valid. God is revealed to human beings in a variety of forms, and all revelations are believed to have saving intent. Emphasis is placed upon the parity and parallelism of the religions. Religious experience itself becomes the norm. What is “truth” in one’s experience is more important than “the truth.”

However, when we think biblically about Christian faith it’s clear that the gospel challenged the variety of religions in the New Testament world. Jesus Christ was Lord, and all people of all cultures and nations were invited to follow him. This message was shared with Jews, with Samaritans, with an Ethiopian (a Jewish proselyte?), with Cornelius (a God-fearing Gentile), with “pagan” Gentiles at Lystra (Acts 14:15) and with sophisticated religious Gentiles at Athens (Acts 17:30). On the missionary journeys from Antioch, the good news of Jesus was shared with Jews and Gentiles. Paul refers to the people of Corinth and Thessalonica as having turned from idols to serve the one true God (1 Cor 12:2; 1 Thess 1:9–10). At Ephesus the gospel threatened the occultists and the goddess Artemis (Acts 19:1–41).

The early church was convinced of the uniqueness of Jesus. He was the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), the only name given under heaven by which people are saved (Acts 4:12), the one foundation (1 Cor 3:11), and the one mediator (1 Tim 2:5–6). In the midst of religious pluralism and syncretism, Christ was considered the fullness of deity and the one who provides fullness of life (Col 2:2–23). Jesus alone showed us who God is.

The world into which the first Christians carried the gospel was religiously plural. The letters of Paul show that there were many lords and many gods. Christians had to understand what the lordship of Christ meant in that situation.

The early church entered into sustained discussion and encounter with some of these groups and sought to formulate the truth of the gospel in Greek-thought forms. Paul believed the gospel was able to bring fulfillment to their Greek yearnings. Paul did not deny the validity of insights in other religions. He recognized religious awareness of the rural pagan Gentiles at Lystra (Acts 14:8–19) even if they were worshipers of Zeus and Hermes. They could observe the witness of God in creation and the cycles of nature. At Athens (17:16–34), in a more sophisticated religious-philosophical environment, Paul both affirmed and connected with the religious sensitivity that they had by referring to the “unknown God” and their being “very religious.” He interacted seriously with the Stoics and Epicureans. He extended their understanding of who God is.

From Lystra and Athens we learn the importance of assessing one’s hearers, acknowledging correct understanding already present, and addressing the issues. Paul showed appreciation for the truth the gospel had in common with their culture. He did not discount that truth or exaggerate it. He did not

over-romanticize the beauty of other religions. He had a clear position; he was gripped by Jesus Christ. He was bold but not arrogant or sarcastic. He did not ridicule. Though respectful and gentle, he clearly rejected their idolatry. He invited them to conversion. The people of Lystra were told “to turn from vain things.” At Athens he said God does not live in shrines nor is served by gold, silver, stone, or the art and imagination of humans. Ignorance must therefore give way to repentance. Paul did not bless them as they were, nor did he call for a synthesis of the gospel and “pagan” religion. The gospel was more than another theory of religion or ethical system. It was more than following the example of a new teacher. It was an invitation to convert from the past to Jesus.

We need to find a balance between respectful recognition of the insights that people have and the need for turning to Jesus. In addition to Acts 14 and 17, one can note John 1 and Rom 1 and 2. John recognized the light of the logos, which brings understanding, but that understanding in itself is not complete. The logos needed to become flesh. Rom 1 and 2 clearly recognize the knowledge people have of God through creation and conscience, but even that knowledge has been exchanged and suppressed. Knowledge in itself is not sufficient for salvation.

These passages are in the context of Rom 1:16, where Paul declares his confidence in the gospel as the power of God for salvation to those who have faith, both Jews and Gentiles. Explicit knowledge and response to the historical disclosure in Jesus is called for. In the past we frequently emphasized the uniqueness of Christ by denying or depreciating the truth in other religions. Today we sometimes over-idealize the good in other religions and waver in our conviction about the once-for-all-ness of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament announces a new fact: In the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, God has acted decisively to effect the possibility of redemption for the whole world. There are different interpretations of this within the New Testament according to each context, but the fact of Christ cannot be discounted. The New Testament writers agree that Christ is decisively important for all peoples everywhere. Jesus was proclaimed as the truth, not as one possible option among others.

What are the crucial issues that concern us as we develop a theology of religions? (Some attention was already given to theocentrism, Cosmic Christ, the mystery of the Spirit's working, and the Trinity.)

1. How can we affirm the ethical and spiritual truths in other religions without surrendering our conviction concerning Jesus Christ? We acknowledge the “search for truth,” “rays of truth,” or “seeds of truth” in other religions as seen in goodness, beauty, spirituality, devotion, and sacrifice. We do not need to reject anything that is true and holy. Given our finiteness, we do not fully understand truth and should not set limits on God's power, but real discernment is required here because we are not obliged to accept that which contradicts the truth revealed

in Jesus. How much emphasis we put on the “seeds of truth” is the interpretive question, because truth is often mixed with untruth. Some aspects of other religions are a preparation for the gospel, but other aspects are judged by the gospel. There are “points of contact,” “redemptive analogies,” and “bridges,” but there are differences and contradictions to Christ. We need to distinguish between seeking and finding in other religions. We believe the search for truth finds its fulfillment in Jesus. Where there is goodness, we believe with Thomas Aquinas that “grace does not annul nature but perfects it.”²⁰ The presence of truth in other religions should call us to relate that to the truth in Jesus; it does not negate the urgency of witness. Truth in other religions is not the expression of God’s kingdom or an alternate way to salvation.

2. If there are truths in other religions, how are we to understand *revelation* and other religions? Christians have frequently spoken of “general revelation” or “natural revelation.” We assume that since humans live in a God-created world and express the image of God, they will have some correct religious understandings (Rom 1, 2). Humans are created to respond to God; they are God-oriented. God has not left himself without witness (Acts 14:17). There is a quest for the spiritual, a universal consciousness of God. But religions not only seek God; they flee from God because of alienation (Rom 1:21, 23). General revelation has been distorted because parts of creation are in rebellion. This provides balance in our assessment of other religions. They should be neither divinized nor demonized.
3. Some move beyond the concept of general revelation to suggest that different religious traditions represent separate revelations from God. This raises the issue of how we define revelation. Is God disclosed partly to some and partly to others? Is there more than one self-disclosure of God? Here we must proceed with great caution. I believe we confuse “revelation” if this term is used for special revelation outside of salvation history in Israel (Old Testament) and Christ (New Testament). Our theological assessment of other religions should not include an understanding of them as alternate ways of revelation and salvation.
4. There is insight in other religions, but it is not the same as revelation in Christ and scripture. The purpose of God’s revelation in Christ is

20 There are multiple English editions of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, so there are multiple citations that could be used here. We were unable to locate the edition that uses the word “annul,” but one version says, “Since grace does not scrap nature but brings it to perfection, so also natural reason should assist faith as the natural loving bent of the will ministers to charity,” in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gilby (Image Books, 1969), I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

to show God's mercy, goodness, and compassion, and God's desire to overcome alienation and restore a relationship. The revelation of God in Christ is a normative revelation. What God has done in Christ opens our eyes to what God has done in general revelation. Revelation in nature, history, and conscience is a partial revelation. We do not belittle that light; we expect to find light and rejoice in it wherever it is found, but we bear witness to the light in Christ.

5. In our discussion of a theology of religions, we must give more attention to creation, history, and providence and their relationship to redemption. How is Christ related to other religions? What is the place of religion in the activity of God in history and creation? It is important that we work at a careful theological assessment of other faiths. Some concentrate more on discerning the work of God in history than on God revealed in Jesus Christ. If Christ enlightens all persons (John 1), and the Spirit anticipates the church's ministry, divine power and grace is to some extent present in creation, history, or providence. We should not use God's presence in creation, history, or providence to diminish his place in redemption. For example, what does it mean that Christ will unite all things in himself (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20)? Is this happening now as Christ works in other religions, or does this happen as people accept him as their salvation? Some argue that Christ is united with each person without exception, even if that person is unaware of it, and that all religious longing is validated by Christ's cross, or that the Spirit is carrying out God's design in history and is guiding all to the fullness of truth. Where is the place for repentance, conversion, and acceptance of Christ? The Ephesians and Colossians passages should be seen in the context of Christ's redemptive work and the church. God purposes the salvation of all humans, but that purpose is not accomplished in ways that bypass the historic event in Christ by which it was revealed and effected.
6. In some circles Christians have moved from "people in other religions may be saved" to "people in other religions *can* be saved." Do other religions have salvific potential? Do other religions express universal Christological grace in less perfect forms? Do we meet Christ in the person who follows another religion? Is Christ the origin, center, and destiny of other religions, even if their adherents do not acknowledge him? Are other religions outside or inside the history of salvation? Does the church have a monopoly on God's grace?
7. Related to this issue is the question, "What happens to those who have no explicit knowledge of or make no explicit confession of Christ?" If God is working in their lives, is it revelation and salvation? Are people saved through other religions or through Christ apart from the explic-

it knowledge of the gospel? What if people, through no fault of their own, have not heard of Christ and the gospel? This is sometimes an issue for Mennonites who emphasize behavior more than creed. Some ask whether those who are doing Christ-like things are really following Christ though not themselves aware of it. On the basis of Matt 25, it is said that what one believes is not so important, as long as one acts correctly.

8. I believe we need to be more explicit about what we mean by salvation and the uniqueness of Christ. Christ is unique, but so also is the Buddha. But *how* is Christ unique in particular? Can we accept Jesus as the one mediator of God in history? We need to explore more deeply the person and message of Jesus and the salvation found in him. We waver in our witness because we don't fully understand the uniqueness of Christ specifically. We believe the kingdom of God has come in Jesus, not in other religions and ideologies. There are no alternate gospels. There is one gospel because there is one Christ. The central theme of the gospel is that Christ reconciles. Even religious people need to hear that gospel.
9. The central issue in many of the questions is the universality of God's grace. We believe that God's grace is present throughout God's universe, but is that grace salvific if it is not accepted? People might be moved by prevenient grace through the Spirit of God, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they have become disciples. Awareness of God or good behavior do not in themselves constitute salvation. Grace is an invitation to repentance and transformation.
10. If grace is present in the universe, so also is judgment. The Bible speaks of God's love and God's wrath. There are consequences in not belonging to Christ—darkness, lostness. But that judgment is Christ's. He is the one who saves or judges. It is not our job to condemn people to destruction nor to give them uncertain assurance. Either one is a judgment, which is not our prerogative. The cross brings judgment on all, including religious people and even Christians. We all stand beneath that cross. Our language is witness—confession, testimony, invitation—not condemnation. Our witness will sometimes be perceived as an implicit judgment, but the gospel must be the judge, not us.
11. Are people then saved outside of explicit knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ? The answer rests with God and not us. We can speculate, but it remains a mystery. If there is such salvation, we believe it will not be through other religious systems or by human effort or merit, but by the assistance of God's grace to those who seek mercy based on the work of Jesus Christ alone. But we have a clear responsibility to witness to that grace precisely because it is such good news, in contrast to all the

- bad news of alienation from God. This is our “operational principle,” explicit in scripture and modeled for us by the New Testament apostles.
12. We in the West are burdened with guilt from the past. In the name of giving up the superiority of Western culture we surrender our understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus. Additionally, we approach questions concerning other religions very theoretically. Can we hear people from other cultures who live in the midst of other religious options? When we listen to first-generation Christians who have left their religion to follow Christ, we are helped in our understanding of the uniqueness of Christ. They can help us distinguish between Western culture and the essence of the gospel. No theological or missiological reflection on this most essential topic can be complete without their voice.
 13. In our concern for a theology of witness, we should not forget the style of witness. We witness as those who have found the gift of grace and wish to share news about that gift. But before such news can be heard, our style must be characterized by qualities that recommend grace—listening, patience, humility, modesty, empathy, and joy. We see the other as a subject, not as an object. Our belief in the uniqueness of Christ should cause us to respect, not demean, the other. Our concern for truth must not eclipse a concern for the person. We do not dilute our commitment to Christ or keep Christ on the periphery. We present the uniqueness of Jesus as positively as possible. Our witness moves beyond the exchange of religious ideas to the good news in Jesus.
 14. Harry Moore, of the Church Missionary Society, asks whether we can move away from the language of conflict and conquest in witness, noting that Bethlehem and Calvary are not images of conquest. He reminds us that our attitudes in mission are frequently triumphalist. He warns of the danger of a “belligerent Christianity.”²¹ This is a particular problem when other religions are aggressive and violent, because we tend to respond in kind. But when other religions are gentle, we frequently have an opposite response. We think that respect for them precludes concern for their conversion. The attitude of Christians should not be conditioned by the stance of other religions toward us but should be motivated and directed by the Spirit as we respond to Christ in each situation.

21 We are uncertain about the exact source of Moore’s statements here.

Eschatology and Mission

It is urgent that more thought be given to the relationship between eschatology and mission. The end of this century is full of expectation and foreboding. There are many secular eschatologies, but there is a sense of pessimism and disillusionment because people have lost faith in the meaning and purpose of history.

What is the Christian hope for the future? What is understood by “new heavens and new earth”? How do we witness to the kingdom in a way that prepares for the return of Christ? Anabaptists had an eschatological passion. They interpreted the present in light of what was to come and accepted mission as a sacred trust. We need a lively hope of Christ’s return. Eschatology, Christology, and mission are intimately connected. Christ is the “clue to history” (Lesslie Newbigin).²² The church is an eschatological community with urgent news to share. It lives between the dawn of Easter and the dawn of Christ’s return. Those who have caught that vision are bearers of hope.

Eschatology helps us keep a balance/tension between the kingdom of God as present and as future, as “now” and “not yet.” This is necessary for wholeness of salvation. We can only understand present manifestations of the kingdom if we see them in the perspective of the coming kingdom. Mission keeps before our consciousness hope for the coming fulfilled kingdom. We need that transcendent dimension. We live in the “penultimate” before the “ultimate.” The coming consummation will bring the final manifestation of the rule of God in history, an “inaugurated eschatology.” It is tragic if we are so preoccupied with the present that we fail to see the future.

There has recently been a theological emphasis on the “now-ness” of the kingdom, a “realized eschatology.” It is important, of course, that we speak of salvation now, but that cannot be separated from the fullness yet to come. Over-emphasis on “pie in the sky” can lead to an equal over-emphasis on renewed life now. There is much more to the significance of Christ than this present life. Without the hope of the end, we have a deficient spirituality. The future is brought into the present, but that should not blot out the future. Rather, it anticipates the future.

We are engaged in the present because of our hope in the future, not a hope that leads to disengagement or escapism but to involvement as we erect signs of the kingdom. We are part of a kingdom movement toward the end. Eschatological hope tempers our disillusionment, despair, and frustration. We are assured that all is in God’s hands even if we don’t see immediate results. Hope is groundless if Christ is not coming back. “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ we are . . . to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). Hope stands in contrast to hopelessness and lostness.

Can we communicate hope as we bring light into the darkness of despair? This is not a false hope, but a hope rooted firmly in the sovereignty of God.

22 Lesslie Newbigin, “Christ, the Clue to History,” *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, chapter 9 (William B. Eerdmans/WCC Publications, 1989), 103.

It is not a hope built upon detailed predictions of the future. Preoccupation with the future is as unfortunate as preoccupation with the present. A biblical eschatology must stand in contrast to popular apocalypticism. Obsession with a “signs-of-the-times” theology easily becomes speculative, calculating, or fanatical. But, on the other hand, detailed theories and their abuse or honest differences in our interpretations of eschatology should not cause us to de-emphasize eschatology. Anticipation of a new heaven and new earth is more important than speculation. The details are within God’s providence. We can be faithful because we know something of the character of the kingdom even if we do not understand details of the end precisely.

Those who live in hope for the future live tentatively. We live “between the times” with watchfulness and patience, redeeming the time. Eschatology inspires urgency in mission. While overstatements of urgency can lead to disappointment or even cynicism in mission, a biblically informed urgency undergirds enduring motivation. We proclaim Christ until he comes (Matt 24; Mark 13).

Some theologies teach that we hasten the coming of Christ by our witness. Is it true that the end of the world will not come until we have gone to the ends of the earth with the gospel? Is it really *we* who determine the end? In discussions concerning unreached people groups, there is sometimes an implicit understanding that if we complete the task, we will effect Christ’s final coming. Let us be more careful in our statements. The promise of his coming is an incentive for mission, and witness is a sign of the “dawn of the end,” but let us not try to hasten the end by our mission fervor. James Scherer said that we need to find our way between “feverish activism” and “lazy eschatological indifference.”²³ David Bosch rejects the idea that mission is a “hand on the clock of the world.”²⁴

We are called to the ends of the earth until the end of time. Eschatology reminds us that our task is not finished. And the fullness of witness is contingent upon eschatology, for Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

23 Source unknown.

24 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Orbis, 1991), 505.

A Congolese Response: “Biblical Hermeneutics Must Be Added to the ‘Essentials’”

Nzash Lumeya

In his essay on Anabaptist missiology, Calvin E. Shenk articulates certain prolegomena of mission theology with eight essential themes: incarnation, kingdom of God, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, soteriology, religions, and eschatology. Shenk analyzes each of these themes biblically to help people engage in mission. Almost three decades after his presentation in January 2000, this insightful missiological perspective sheds a bright light on a broad Mennonite understanding of mission theology. It opens our minds to think theologically and to strengthen our relationship with Jesus Christ through the scriptures. We commend the author for calling our attention to missiological themes that are confronting us as Anabaptists.

We Underestimate the Significance of Good—and Bad— Hermeneutics

I suggest adding one essential theme to the eight above: biblical hermeneutics. I believe this should be included in Shenk’s theological list. In particular, a biblical interpretation of the scriptures could assist a certain ethnic group in avoiding misreading and misunderstanding God’s urgent call to make disciples of all the nations. The Mbala Kipuka people in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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have wrongly applied the curse on Ham/Canaan to their genealogy: “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers” (Gen 9:25).

This curse on Canaan the son of Ham is interpreted in the Mbala mindset as the explanation of their black skin and slavery. The issue of the Ham/Canaan curse is a serious missiological matter among the Mbala Kipuka people in the DRC, and it impacts their ethnic worldview. It lies deep within their consciousness and causes harm to the local church in Kafumba spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. In 2024, when the Kafumba church was celebrating its centennial and I was invited to preach, I thought about this acute problem facing many Mbala people—a problem needing an appropriate Anabaptist response to correct this grievous wrong.¹

Revisiting the Genesis Text Could Correct a Devastating Misunderstanding

A study of cursing and blessing in Gen 9:20–27 as a coherent unit is timely and of the highest importance. The passage portrays Noah’s relationship with the land, on one hand, and with his family, on the other hand. This literary unit links verses 18 and 19 to form the opening passage for the entire section. Then follows verses 20 to 27, which focus on Noah. The two last verses conclude the narrative with his death.

Gen 9:20–27 is unique in the biblical record of primeval history. It is the only literary unit involving a curse in which someone other than the Lord appears explicitly as the author of an *arar* curse formula. Another feature of this unit concerns the drunkenness of Noah. Nowhere else in the entire scripture do we have an echo of either Noah’s intoxication or Canaan’s curse. These critical issues are found only in this unique literary unit. This points to the need to examine the sin of Ham.

According to verse 22, “Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside.” He saw but did not cover his father’s nakedness, but Shem and Japhet walked in backwards and covered their father’s naked body. In Habakkuk, nakedness is a result of drunkenness: “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies” (Hab 2:15). To see the nakedness of someone was considered irreverent and shameful. It was conceived as a disgrace.

Lam 4:21 says, “Rejoice and be glad, Daughter Edom, you who live in the land of Uz. But to you also the cup will be passed; you will be drunk and stripped naked.”

1 It should here be noted here that whenever words such as “Africa” or “the DRC” are mentioned in this essay, I am referring to the Kafumba and Kikwit areas, except where otherwise noted. The Mbala people are also known as Bambala’ a Kipuka (i.e., “Mbala people from Kipuka county”).

When Noah became aware of Ham's visual transgression, he uttered an evil wish upon Canaan: There would be brokenness of relationship between Canaan and his siblings. He would be the servant of servants, experiencing the disgrace of servitude. Canaan must submit to his brothers.

According to the Old Testament, the Canaanites inhabited Palestine, not Africa (Gen 10:18; Josh 5:1; Exod 33:2). To identify the curse of Canaan with the present state of the Black populations in Africa seems unbiblical and inadmissible. Any attempt to establish a direct "cause-and-effect" relationship between Canaan's curse and skin color today is absurd, and very wrong. The text does not suggest color-boundedness. To identify the Mbala with the curse uttered on Canaan appears to be a mere ethnocentric speculation.

An Anabaptist biblical and Christocentric hermeneutic could enable messengers of Jesus to interpret a text in its biblical context instead of imposing a given cultural perspective from their *milieu de vie* as a normative interpretation of a biblical text.

By becoming "a curse for us" (Gal 3:13), Jesus Christ becomes the one who fulfills the promise of universal blessing given to Abraham (Gen 12:3; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 4:14). Now that Jesus has voluntarily sought to become an object of the divine curse for all Jews, he has removed forever the obstacle that separated Gentiles from faith. On the cross Jesus made it possible for the Mbala people to receive the Holy Spirit and be transformed (Gal 3:14). Faith in Jesus is the only way to enter into a relationship with God and become the light of Jesus locally and globally.

Bad Hermeneutics Exclude the Mbala from Participating in God's Mission

The book of Genesis does not mention a change of Ham's skin color. It is wrong to link the black skin color of the Mbala people with Noah's curse on Canaan. There is no biblical text that supports the absurd association of black complexion with evil. This confusion needs to be vigorously addressed in order to help the Mbala people understand that the Bible does not consider black skin to be the result of Noah's curse on Canaan. Unless a clear biblical hermeneutic is proclaimed denouncing the myth of the irreversible curse on Black people, world evangelization will be interpreted as a task of white Anabaptists.

This flawed understanding that associates obedience to the Great Commission with skin color is unbiblical and wrong. As a Congolese Anabaptist, I am convinced that this skin-color mission paradigm should be confronted and biblically re-interpreted. We need an Anabaptist biblical hermeneutic able to deal with this missiological problem of dark skin and the curse on Ham/Canaan in a healthy biblical way (Gen 9:25–27). In my humble opinion, this thematic misinterpretation should not only be spoken but also written in commentaries:

The one being cursed by Noah is not the ancestor of Black people. Neither is the curse expressed in this text either irreversible or unusual in the Old Testament. Professors, teachers, and lecturers dealing with the curse motif in Genesis must make sure that their audiences understand this concept well enough so that even if it were possible to identify Canaan's descendants today, all would recognize the sinfulness of selling them, exploiting them, or denying them leadership positions on the basis of this text or any other.

There is no linkage between Canaan and the Mbala people. Even if it were possible to identify all the Canaanites in today's world, Christ would have compassion on them, listen to them, and heal those who believe, just as he shared his blessing with the Canaanite woman and healed her daughter (Matt 15:21).

Congolese Anabaptists Are Blessed Black Ambassadors of the Lord

At our missiological university center in Kinshasa (in the DRC), a great effort must be devoted to understanding the Great Commission as the divine imperative dealing with love for God and our neighbor, beyond our spiritual and physical barriers.

Jesus Christ looked at himself as a servant (John 13:16; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). He was introduced to the first known African Christian, an Ethiopian, as the suffering servant (Isa 52:2–53:12; Acts 8:26–29). Congolese Anabaptists are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit and faithfully serve the Lord in world mission as blessed Black ambassadors of the Lord. “Envoys will come from Egypt, Cush will submit herself to God. Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, to him who rises across the highest heavens, who thunders with mighty voice” (Ps 68:31–33).

In order to be faithful to the scripture, and to avoid mistakes similar to the above, it is critical to add biblical hermeneutics to Calvin E. Shenk's list of essential themes of an Anabaptist theology of mission.

Anabaptist Missiology: Anthropological Perspectives¹

Delores and J. Stanley Friesen

Introduction

It was part of missionary folklore when we arrived in Nigeria in 1965 that you could count on finding two things on the bedside table of missionaries: their devotional material and an issue of *Practical Anthropology*. The mid-sixties was a time of burgeoning interest in the discipline of anthropology and its implications for the missionary enterprise. Four of the most widely recognized Mennonite anthropologists of this era were in their full stride. Each had initially been a missionary serving under of the Mennonite mission agencies prior to their academic specialization in anthropology. Looking back over our own thirty-five years of ministry, Jacob Loewen, Paul Hiebert, Robert Ramseyer, and Don Jacobs have all been mentors, models, and teachers for us, as well as for a whole generation of missionaries.

This presentation is a series of “soundings” into the contributions of Anabaptist Mennonite anthropologists to missiology. The four most widely known Mennonite anthropologists all have had missionary experience with a Mennonite mission agency. Their anthropological roles in relation to the missionary enterprise have been diverse. Jacob Loewen taught anthropology at Tabor College before becoming a worldwide translations consultant for the United Bible Societies. His original missionary experience was among the Waunan Indigenous people of Columbia, and later he served in Panama. He was a frequent contributor to *Practical Anthropology*. Paul Hiebert’s career, after his missionary experience in India, has been more academic, serving as Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies at Fuller’s School of World Mission and more recently as

1 This presentation by Delores and J. Stanley Friesen was one of four papers presented at the inaugural meeting of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists (AAM) at Techny Towers north of Chicago, IL, in January 2000. It was later edited and published as “Anthropology, Anabaptists and Mission” in *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 8 (2000): 55–61. At the time of the initial presentation, the Friesens had finished their assignments with Mennonite Board of Mission in Nigeria and Ghana and were living in Fresno, California, where Delores was Professor of Counseling at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary and Stan was serving as a mission consultant.

Professor of Anthropology and Mission at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Robert Ramseyer was a long-term missionary in Japan, beginning in 1954, and later served as Director of the Overseas Mission Training Center at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries. Donald Jacob's writing comes out of his long association with the Mennonite Church in East Africa, where he served as bishop and developer of theological education. He also served as Director of Overseas Ministries for the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and as director of the Mennonite Christian Leadership Foundation.

Their writings address some of the critical issues of the past, which are still being debated today, such as: (1) the role of the missionary in relation to an emerging church, (2) translation of the gospel into the spiritual language and experience of another culture, and (3) finding structures that are appropriate for partnership in mission between older sending churches and emerging churches. After a brief look at the anthropological contributions of Anabaptist Mennonites, we will identify some of the issues and questions that need ongoing attention. Some areas where more could be done include: (1) appropriation of peace theology and witness, (2) shifts in epistemology, (3) cross-cultural counseling, (4) the place and role of women in the church and society, (5) the church as a hermeneutic community, and (6) the relevance of anthropology to our increasingly diverse congregations and communities in North America.

The Historical Setting

One of the earliest Mennonite ethnographers was Heinrich Voth, a General Conference missionary who lived and worked among the Hopi and Arapaho between 1892 and 1906. According to Cathy Ann Trotta, the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College in Kansas contains over 2,000 negatives and glass slides attributed to Voth.² He collected Native American artifacts for the Smithsonian Institute and exhibited them at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Jim Juhnke describes Voth as a curious mixture of missionary and ethnographer who offended his mission board by personally profiting from the sale of Indigenous artifacts and offended the Hopi by revealing their ritual secrets to the public.³ In the end, Voth had to give up his missionary career. However, a hundred years later, Voth's reputation as an ethnographer has been somewhat redeemed, because Voth's photographs have been an invaluable asset to the Hopi in their reconstruction of some of their traditional ritual objects.

2 Cathy Ann Trotta, "Crossing Cultural Boundaries: Heinrich and Martha Moser Voth in the Hopi Pueblos, 1893–1906" (unpublished PhD diss., Northern Arizona University, 1997).

3 James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890–1930* (Herald Press, 1989).

The era following World War II witnessed a vigorous interaction between mission and anthropology. It was in this early postcolonial era that Mennonites became serious about the application of anthropological studies to mission. The impetus came from Eugene Nida and the American Bible Society translation teams. Nida's pioneering books *Customs and Cultures* (Harper and Row, 1954) and *Message and Mission* (Harper and Row, 1960), along with the periodical *Practical Anthropology* (1953–1973) edited by William Smalley, became some of the formative instruments shaping missionary anthropology at midcentury.

A number of missionary linguists have played an important part in the development of linguistic and translation theory: H. A. Gleason at the Kennedy School of Missions, Kenneth Pike at the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators, and Eugene Nida of the United Bible Societies. It would be instructive to know how many Anabaptists and Mennonites studied or were involved in Bible translation because of these three institutions. Among the best-known Mennonites were Jacob Loewen and Harold Fehderau. Fehderau spent ten years as a missionary translator on the Kituba language project in Congo and produced a grammar, dictionary, and book called *The Origins and Development of Kituba*.⁴ Harold gave another twelve years in Africa as translations consultant for the United Bible Societies.

Overall, it would seem that in the past century contributions have centered around a more applied, pragmatic form of anthropology; that is, it was used to identify better ways of communicating the gospel, or in the training and educating of missionaries and pastors, rather than studying or developing ethnographic and descriptive profiles of cultures and peoples. For example, the skills and resources of linguist and anthropologist Bill Reyburn were utilized in specific Toba language projects and social-structure issues related to the emerging church. It is also instructive that with the exception of Harold Fehderau, Anabaptist anthropologists have not focused much attention on African independent churches or the spiritual church movement in Africa, though Mennonites have had four decades of effective ministries within this large and growing indigenous movement.

Anabaptist missionaries and their boards have been great borrowers of mission theology and strategy from the larger stream of the Christian missionary endeavor. In the field of missionary anthropology, the pattern is no different; in the idiom of anthropologists, we Anabaptist Mennonites are “hunters and gatherers.”

4 See also Harold Fehderau, “The Origin and Development of Kituba (Lingua Franca Kikongo),” in *Linguistic and Literary Studies in Honor of Archibald A. Hill*, eds. Mohammad Ali Jazayeri, Edgar C. Polome, and Werner Winter, vol. 2 (Mouton, 1978), 259–265.

Missionary Roles and Relationships

On the critical questions of how to structure postcolonial relations between sending churches and newly organized churches so that both integrity and autonomy are preserved, Jacob Loewen along with William Smalley and William Reyburn have used role theory to provide insights on the relationships a missionary may have with an emerging church.⁵

When Loewen was writing in the 1960s, many missionaries regarded their calling as long-term. Currently with more short-term and specialized assignments, the question of the roles a missionary plays in relation to a younger church is a vital issue that could benefit from anthropological insight. How does one play a supervisory role with respect to funds sent from the sending North American church, or for a funding agency like the USAID, which gives ASHA grants to a school or hospital? Or what about being an outside resource person who comes in for a short time? This is one of the roles Loewen identifies that seems to be valuable even now for the outsider to suggest and offer options and alternatives that the local churches may not readily think of.⁶

A resource with an outside perspective is a valuable role, particularly as a church learns the conversational process of discernment. There are several present-day examples where one of the missionary's main functions is to be the conduit for communication and fiscal responsibility between a national Mennonite conference and an international Mennonite church agency. It appears that both the Mennonite World Conference and the International Conference of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) may well play similar roles in the future. Here is another place where anthropological insight is needed.

The roles of women in mission have changed significantly in the twentieth century, and their contribution to missionary anthropology should not be overlooked. Fran Hiebert, Anne Loewen, Anna Ruth Jacobs, and Alice Ruth Ramseyer all played significant roles and assisted their spouses in experiencing, conversing, editing, and compiling anthropological and theological works. Fran Hiebert also wrote several articles about the roles of women in the church, including one on the cultural and ideological influences on the role of women⁷ and another on "Missionary Women as Models in the Cross-Cultural Context."⁸ Fran was willing to take on questions that were being debated and was able to

5 Jacob Loewen, "Roles, Self-Image, and Missionary Communication," *Practical Anthropology* 14 (July–August 1967).

6 Jacob Loewen, "The Missionary Role," *Journal of Church and Society* 3 (Spring 1967): 3–22.

7 Francis Hiebert, "Cultural and Ideological Influences on the Role of Women," *Priscilla Papers* 3, no. 12 (Summer 1998): 2–6.

8 Francis Hiebert, "Missionary Women as Models in the Cross-Cultural Context," *Missiology: An International Review* 10 (October 1982): 455–460.

articulate her own position and critique and respond to alternative views. She often included case studies and personal testimony in her writing. The presence of more women trained professionally in the field of anthropology, like Katrina Poetker and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, may further change the landscape.

Art, Music, Story and Mythology

The most well-known Mennonite writer and contributor to the work of United Bible Societies (UBS) has been Jacob Loewen, who frequently worked in association with his wife, Anne. Jake is a gifted storyteller and a peddler of stories and ideas from one mission station to another in the process of his travels as a consultant for UBS. What makes his narration powerful is his gift of appropriate self-revelation, and the use of self-reflection to draw out from persons of another culture their “innermost.”⁹ Loewen has addressed some of the problems of transition from tribal religion to Christianity. According to Loewen, the study of a people’s myths, rather than leading to syncretism, provides a rich source of vocabulary dealing with religious experience.¹⁰ Loewen commends Don Jacobs, who in teaching biblical theology began with a systematic investigation of the traditional myths and beliefs of his students in East Africa. In spite of Loewen’s advocacy for the value of studying mythology, we are aware of only one published collection by a Mennonite missionary, *African Fables That Teach about God* by Eudene Keidel (Herald Press, 1978). These tales were recorded while the Keidels were AIMM missionaries in Zaire.

However, Mennonites have been more interested in hymnody and music as a means to understand the theology and the religious language of a people entering Christianity from tribal religions. Mary Oyers’s study of ethnic musicology has greatly enriched the hymnody of the North American Church. James R. Krabill’s analysis of Dida Harrist hymnology¹¹ and Mary Anne Isaak’s study of the emerging hymnody of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Congo¹² are two further examples.

9 Jacob Loewen, “A Mennonite Encounter with the ‘Innermost’ of the Lengua Indians,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 39 (January 1965): 40–67.

10 Jacob Loewen, “Mythology and Missions: Should a Missionary Study Tribal Myths?” *Practical Anthropology* 16 (1969): 147–192.

11 James R. Krabill, “Dida Harrist Hymnology (1913–1990),” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 20, no. 2 (June): 118–152.

12 Mary Anne Isaak, “Zairian Theology in Four-Part Harmony,” *Direction* 22 (Fall 1993): 39–50. This is a summary of her master’s thesis presented to the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.

Structure of Mission

One of the many solid contributions Paul Hiebert has made is to examine our social structures and their impact on the growth of the church.¹³ In the colonial past, the two models of mission structure have been the denominational mission board and the mission society (e.g., China Inland Mission). Neither structure has been entirely satisfactory in relating to the emerging churches and mutual commitment to mission.

Hiebert's questions identify a number of the major issues that must be addressed. How do we recognize the autonomy and the equality of the church in different countries while still providing organizational structure that permits cooperation in mission? How do we overcome cultural differences, feelings of superiority, inequality of wealth, and national loyalties to become one in Christ? Unity needs both theological expression and articulation as well as the social structures to carry out mission together. The challenge is that the churches of the West still have the major economic resources, the dominant repository of the historical records and archives of the worldwide Christian movement, and access to the most advanced educational resources.

These issues and questions are not new, but they become ever more urgent as the percentage of Christians in the two-thirds world exceeds those in the West. Hans Kasdorf's analysis of the fifteen missiological statements of member agencies of the Council of International Ministries (CIM) points out among his "neglected essentials" in these documents that no one gives an adequate response to the implications that true partnering might have for ongoing mission.¹⁴ How will partnership impact the structure of mission at such practical levels of financial management, missionary methods, and multilinguistic and multinational teams? Jeanine Janzen's recent thesis addresses some of these questions.¹⁵

In the current reshuffling of structures as the merger of the General Conference and Mennonite Church denominations proceeds, Tom Lehman, Chair of the Commission on Overseas Mission, has raised a provocative question: "Is there a role that Mennonite World Conference can play in guiding mission planning and even mission administration in the transformed mission enterprise

13 Paul Hiebert, "Social Structure and Church Growth," in *Crucial Dimensions in World Evangelization*, eds. Arthur F. Glasser, Paul G. Hiebert, C. Peter Wagner, and Ralph D. Winter (William Carey, 1976), 61–74; Paul Hiebert, "The Bicultural Bridge," *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Baker, 1985), 227–253.

14 Hans Kasdorf, "Toward an Anabaptist Missiology for the 1990s: A Missiologists Perspective," in *A Relevant Anabaptist Missiology for the 1990s*, ed. Calvin Shenk (Council of International Ministries, 1990), 3–18. This was an unpublished collection of articles by Mennonite missiologists for the Council of International Ministries.

15 Jeanine Janzen, "Partnership in Mission: A Model for the Global MB Family" (unpublished master's thesis, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1999).

that we are trying so hard to discover”?¹⁶ Lehman is aware that the era of international mission conceived and directed from North America is coming to a close. Is there a forum where Mennonite leaders from other continents can cooperate with North American agencies to create vision and structures of administration to carry out the mission?

Peace and Justice Issues

Where are we in terms of globalization and of our peace and justice witness? Don Jacobs, as an anthropologist, speaks with the pastoral voice of a bishop. He writes from within the internal life of the East African church and often speaks of the experience of the Holy Spirit in the discerning processes of the East African Revival Fellowship meetings.¹⁷ His descriptions resonate with the joyful and vibrant worship of the Church of the Lord Aladura in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.¹⁸ His pastoral passion comes alive in his article “Ethnicity: Friend or Foe” in the commemorative volume of *Direction*.¹⁹ In this article Jacobs reflects on a “peace-making” ministry in a Tanzanian church torn by a decade-old schism nurtured by fanning a smoldering tribalism.

One of the great tragedies of the church in Africa has been the violence linked to tribalism. The irony is that some of the areas of the continent that have been most responsive to Christian missions and have also been deeply influenced by the East African Revival have experienced some of the most vicious ethnic genocides, particularly in parts of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. Don Jacobs’s article in *Direction* underscores the need for the anthropological study of conflict resolution in African societies.

But more importantly, a theology of peacemaking that grows out of experiences of the church of Africa must be nurtured. The Revival Fellowships of Kenya and Rwanda during the Mau Mau and Hutu-Tutsi conflict at the time of national independence in the 1960s gave a costly peace witness, at times even to the point of people laying down their lives. Anglican Bishop Festo Kivengere’s message to the Revival Fellowship in Rwanda was: “Use only one weapon, that of Calvary love for all!”

It is Bob Ramseyer’s observation that “with few exceptions, Mennonite Churches founded by Mennonite missionaries as part of the modern missionary

16 Letter from Thomas A. Lehman to Larry Miller, Christmas Day, 1999.

17 Donald Jacobs, “Walking Together in East Africa,” *Concern*, no. 14 (February 1967): 44–48; Donald Jacobs, “The Charismatic in East Africa,” *Concern*, no. 15 (July 1967): 36–39.

18 Donald Jacobs, “Sunday in Africa . . . Let’s Go to Church: Church and Symbol,” *Risk* 7, no. 3 (1971): 36–41.

19 Donald Jacobs, “Ethnicity: Friend or Foe,” *Direction* 28, no. 1 (1999): 73–74.

movement lack a distinct peace witness.”²⁰ This observation needs to be revisited and researched to see what growth there has been in peace awareness.²¹

If our peace witness is to be heard and we are prepared to stand with our Christian brethren in their revolutionary circumstances, Don Jacobs has identified the challenge before us. “The unholy alliance of Christianity, capitalism, and Western culture is plaguing the church. This alliance must be dissolved if Western churches are to be effective in ‘brothering’ with churches in the developing nations.”²² If there is an Anabaptist priority that should shape our missiology, there is no doubt that the peace witness must be integral. But are we prepared to pay the price that Don Jacobs identifies? It should be noted that mediation services have broadened their scope to include cross-cultural perspective and missions to various parts of the world.

Ongoing Issues and Questions

How should mission be done in an anti-colonial postmodern era, characterized by religious relativism and accusations of Christian imperialism? Paul Hiebert provides an instructive guide through the epistemological currents in his book *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts*.²³

Our contemporary world is polarized between the positivism of modern science and the relativism of instrumentalism and idealism. Hiebert helps us see that these are false alternatives, and he sketches the significance of critical realism. Critical realism is grounded in the concept of the hermeneutical community, a concept Anabaptists have affirmed for the interpretation of scripture. The meaning of the scriptures is understood and interpreted most fully only within a community of interpretation. Critical realism affirms a real world that exists independently from human perceptions and opinions, while restoring emotions and moral judgments as essential parts of knowing. Hiebert feels that in an age of theological pluralism and contextualization as churches are planted in different cultures, the conversational process of the hermeneutic community becomes even more essential to our understanding of the Bible and mission.

20 Robert Ramseyer, “Mennonite Missions and the Peace Witness,” *Mission and the Peace Witness*, ed. Robert Ramseyer (Herald Press, 1979), 115.

21 Mennonite professor Tom Lehman, for example, indicates that one of the General Conference partners in Colombia is in the process of articulating a more distinct peace witness.

22 Donald Jacobs, *The Christian Stance in a Revolutionary Age*, Focal Pamphlet no. 14 (Herald Press, 1968), 24.

23 Paul Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truths in a Modern/Post Modern World* (Trinity Press, 1999).

Robert Ramseyer asked some significant questions from a believers' church and anthropologist perspective in his essay in *The Challenge of Church Growth*.²⁴ A quarter-century later these same questions seem relevant, as Anabaptists evaluate our vision of mission and growth in the current popularity of the "mega" church. Some of Ramseyer's concerns may be summarized as follows: (1) If the minimization of social and cultural upheaval as people become Christians is a high priority, then the assumption is that the more the Christian faith performs the traditional functions in society, the better the church will grow. What does this say about the gospel, the nature of the church, and the role of Christians in society? (2) Is the Believers Church design always a minority? If so, is it similar enough to other churches that it fulfills enough of the same social functions to create growth, or does it have another function in society? How does our theology of church impact our potential for growth?

In addition to the important issues that Ramseyer raises, additional questions might include some of the following:

1. What are the principles and assumptions of Anabaptist missionary anthropology?
2. How can the structures of mission move more fully to a partnership model? How do our cultural values affect the practical matters of short-termers, financial management, missionary methods, and multi-linguistic and multinational teams?
3. How might anthropological insight contribute to our understanding of the growing intercultural and multiethnic nature of our churches and communities in North America?
4. How will the narrative and constructivist approaches of the postmodern world impact our framework and priorities of mission? Should we make a more conscious attempt to go beyond our typical pragmatic focus?
5. What voices have not been heard? How can we strengthen and hear these unheard voices?
6. How do we facilitate discoveries and learning from the visual and creative arts of the church—drama, myth, legend, story, dance, music, poetry, etc.—in our own and in other cultures?
7. Pastoral care and counseling are a growing edge in our seminaries and congregations. The process, methods, and results of healing, illness, and shalom have long been of interest to anthropologists. However, this area seems to be noticeably absent in missiological literature. How might the healing arts be a venue for conversation and dialogue?

24 Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *The Challenge of Church Growth: A Symposium*, Missionary Studies no. 1 (Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1973).

An Indian Response: “Anthropology, Mission, and the Weight of Insecurity”

Elisabeth Kunjam

In their 2000 essay “Anabaptist Missiology: Anthropological Perspectives,” J. Stanley and Delores Friesen described how anthropology helped Anabaptist missions engage culture. They showed how it encouraged missionaries to recognize cultural difference, question assumptions of superiority, and pay attention to power within mission relationships. They looked toward a future in which leadership would be transferred to local churches, missionary control would decrease, and partnerships between churches would grow stronger. They hoped that these changes would slowly ease tensions inherited from colonial mission structures and allow indigenous churches to grow in confidence, agency, and discernment.

This essay revisits that vision from the Indian Anabaptist context. The main argument here is that while Friesen and Friesen emphasized the value of anthropology in revealing cultural blind spots and power dynamics, their framework did not address how leadership transfer unfolds in contexts marked by long histories of inequality, trauma, and low institutional trust. In such settings, responsibility is often transferred before communities have enough time or security to heal, build trust, develop theological depth, and form stable patterns of shared leadership. Instead of reducing power differences, early transfer under insecure conditions can create new patterns of fear, control, silence, and status-seeking within church life.

From the Indian Anabaptist experience, anthropology must therefore attend not only to culture and mission relationships, but also to how insecurity and social aspiration reshape authority, discernment, and peace witness over time.

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The sections that follow examine how these dynamics have shaped Indian Anabaptist churches. These reflections are offered as an extension of Friesen and Friesen's questions, seen from a context where the consequences of mission transition are still a part of everyday church life.

Premature Transfer of Power Under Conditions of Insecurity

Leadership transfer in Indian Anabaptist churches did not happen slowly or through careful planning. In the mid-1970s, many missionaries were required to leave India with little warning. As a result, Indian churches suddenly received full responsibility for leadership. The churches also inherited mission-established institutions such as schools, hospitals, land, and administrative structures, with little time to receive the spiritual and administrative training required to manage them.

Mission work had developed within a particular operating culture where missionaries had the central role. They often acted as stabilizing figures in church and institutional life. Their presence provided continuity, access to resources, and external authority. Even though power differences were present, the system relied heavily on missionaries to manage problems, resolve conflict, and hold institutions together.

Indian Christians often related to missionaries with a high level of trust. This trust was shaped not only by personal relationships, but also by social hierarchy. In Indian society, trust is directed upward—toward those seen as powerful, resourceful, educated, or connected to global systems. Caution is common toward peers or those of lower status. As outsiders with authority and resources, missionaries naturally received this upward trust.

When missionaries left, Indian churches were expected to manage the same institutions without this stabilizing presence. Many Anabaptist communities had strong faith and local leadership experience. However, they had limited experience in managing large institutions, working with legal systems, or exercising administrative authority. Leadership responsibility expanded suddenly, even while confidence, trust, and institutional skill were still developing.

This transition occurred within the context of low institutional trust and centuries-long histories of caste-based insecurity. Conversion to Christianity often offered dignity and belonging to marginalized communities. However, it did not quickly heal patterns of silence before authority, avoidance of risk, and fear of speaking openly. These patterns remained present within church life.

Before such insecurity could be addressed through formation and healing, leadership responsibility had already shifted, and as a result the growth of security and identity within the church remained stunted. Authority had to be exercised before confidence was built. Leaders made decisions quickly and under pressure, often with serious consequences for institutional survival. Under these

conditions, trust-based leadership and communal discernment, which are central to Anabaptist life, were difficult to sustain.

Indigenization did take place, but it happened under urgency rather than preparation. This shaped long-term leadership patterns. Authority became protective, not participatory and collaborative. Stability was valued over openness, and control replaced shared discernment. Yet these patterns should not be seen as moral failures. They reflect leadership formed under conditions of insecurity, where sudden responsibility met existing hierarchical trust.

Power, Resources, and the Search for Security

The changes described above did not end with the transfer of leadership. They were shaped further by how power and security are understood in Indian society. In this context, power is rarely abstract or neutral. It is closely connected to visible signs of stability such as wealth, land, education, and control over institutions. These signs influence how authority is recognized and trusted, both in society and within church life.

Wealth is often understood not only as economic capacity, but also as a sign of competence and legitimacy. Those with resources are assumed to be capable leaders, while poverty is linked with vulnerability and limited voice. This way of thinking influences how leadership is understood within churches.

Land and institutions carry particular importance. Mission-established schools, hospitals, churches, and offices introduced land ownership and infrastructure into Indian Anabaptist life. These institutions served important social purposes and became visible signs of the church's contribution to education, health care, and public welfare. They also offered a sense of stability and shared dignity to communities that had long been denied security and recognition.

Over time, however, managing these institutions required regular engagement with legal systems, financial regulations, and government authorities. Those who could navigate these systems gained influence and respect. Gradually, leadership authority became closely tied to the ability to protect and manage land and institutions in a difficult and hostile environment. In this setting, protecting property came to be understood as protecting the church itself. Administrative skill became a key measure of leadership strength. The loss of land or institutions was experienced not only as organizational failure, but as a threat to community dignity and survival. Stability therefore began to carry moral weight and shaped how decisions were defended.

Education also became an important marker of authority, but its meaning was shaped by history. For centuries, marginalized communities had been denied access to education. Through mission work, education reached these groups for the first time. While access to education created new possibilities, learning has often been understood mainly as a means of survival—necessary

for employment and economic security. Habits of learning for reflection, questioning, and self-understanding take longer to develop. As a result, theological learning remains fragile, not because of weak faith, but because education itself is still shaped by survival needs.

Other forms of security further shaped leadership. Government employment offered stable income and familiarity with bureaucratic systems, which carried social respect in uncertain settings. Formal theological education also carried authority, especially when linked to recognized credentials. Many leaders were trained in non-Anabaptist seminaries that emphasized professional expertise and hierarchical leadership, influencing church practices over time.

These forms of security were not harmful in and of themselves. However, in fragile contexts they unintentionally concentrated authority among those with access to resources, education, and systems of power. Therefore, leadership became cautious and protective, while practices of shared discernment and mutual accountability became harder to observe. As a result, Anabaptist practices such as collective decision-making and communal discernment were weakened. Questioning decisions related to institutions, finances, or property felt risky, especially when stability appeared threatened.

Shrinking Moral and Theological Space

The growing focus on protecting resources and institutions did not happen by itself. It developed at the same time that Christians were slowly losing space to speak and act freely in public life. Missionaries and Christian institutions were closely linked to education, health care, and service among poor and marginalized communities. Schools and hospitals helped create a positive public image of Christianity. Churches were seen as supporting social development rather than threatening social order. This moral standing gave Christians some freedom to speak publicly about ethics, justice, and peace.

During this period, Anabaptist commitments—especially nonviolence—also found support in Indian society. The freedom struggle led by M. K. Gandhi gave moral value to nonviolence, sacrifice, and resistance without force. In this setting, Anabaptist peace convictions were not easily dismissed. Speaking about peace was understood as serious moral thought rather than weakness.

Over time, however, this moral space became smaller. Political narratives began to value strength, control, and dominance. Power came to be understood mainly in terms of authority and force. As a result, nonviolence appeared impractical or unrealistic, and peace-based traditions slowly lost public credibility.

At the same time, Christian institutions came under increasing suspicion. Activities once seen as service were now viewed through political and ideological lenses. Public trust declined as cases of moral failure, misuse of power, and lack of accountability within Christian institutions became visible. Christianity's

moral authority weakened not only because of outside pressure, but also because churches began to reflect the same hierarchies and compromises found in wider society.

This shrinking space was also present within Indian Christianity itself. Churches established during the colonial period often drew members from educated and socially elite groups. Over time, these churches gained greater public confidence and theological influence, and their traditions came to be seen as mainstream. In contrast, many Anabaptist churches—formed through missionary humanitarian work—were made up of people from economically and socially marginalized communities. This created a hierarchy within Indian Christianity, where some churches carried more theological influence than others.

Within this hierarchy, Anabaptist theology held a fragile position. While practices such as community life and service were partly accepted, key convictions—such as nonviolence, separation of church and state, and resistance to Christian nationalism—remained marginal. These commitments were often seen as politically risky or theologically weak when compared with traditions more closely connected to power and public influence.

This weakness was strengthened by limited theological formation. Although Anabaptist leaders from outside India often visited for seminars and workshops, much was lost in translation—linguistic, cultural, and contextual. Short-term visits rarely led to theological grounding. In the same way, although some Indian Anabaptists were supported for theological study abroad, only a few returned to serve long-term in Indian churches. Among those who did return, some were not given space to lead because their education was seen as a threat to existing leadership. Others, due to financial pressure and lack of stable support, were pushed toward more secure employment.

As a result, sustained teaching of Anabaptist theology remained limited. Anabaptist convictions did not disappear, but they began being expressed in private rather than in public. Peace witness turned inward and became cautious. Silence grew, not only because of political pressure, but also because churches lacked the ability to reflect and teach theology over time.

Insecurity and the Quiet Reshaping of Anabaptist Identity

As moral credibility declined and political suspicion increased, Indian Anabaptist churches entered a period marked by uncertainty and fear. Christian institutions came under closer public and administrative attention. Structures once seen mainly as signs of service began to be viewed as potential sources of risk.

Experiences of pressure, however, have not been the same across Christian communities. Established Mennonite churches, especially those with long-standing buildings used openly for worship, have generally not faced direct violent persecution. For Mennonite churches, pressure is largely indirect and

administrative. Foreign funding is tightly regulated, and even small errors in audits or reporting can result in the loss of government authorization to receive overseas donations. In addition, church-owned land that is not actively used—often land inherited from mission history—faces the risk of government scrutiny or seizure. As a result, fear in these churches is shaped less by physical violence and more by legal vulnerability, financial compliance, and the possibility of institutional loss.

In contrast, violent persecution is more common among newer churches and house churches, especially in rural and remote areas, often started through evangelistic movements of other Christian groups. These churches are frequently made up of economically poor, less educated, and socially vulnerable believers. They face social boycott, intimidation, false complaints, and at times physical violence. These experiences are often local and informal, but they produce lasting fear.

Although constitutional protections for worship remain, enforcement at the local level is uneven. House churches in particular live with constant uncertainty. Fear of complaints, or of sudden disruption, shapes everyday church life. In such settings, decisions are often guided more by risk than by theological reflection. Survival becomes a central concern.

Because of these pressures, many newer churches seek protection by associating themselves with older and more established churches. These churches often have legal recognition, institutional experience, and familiarity with government systems. Extending such protection involves real risk, but it also reflects genuine care and solidarity. These arrangements bring immediate benefits: Newer churches gain legitimacy and a sense of safety, while older churches offer hospitality to vulnerable communities.

At the same time, these relationships are usually formed out of urgency rather than shared theological vision. The primary concern is protection, not formation. As a result, little space exists for theological conversation, communal discernment, or reflection on church identity. Differences in belief and practice often remain unexamined.

Over time, this situation quietly reshapes Anabaptist identity. Practices such as nonviolence, shared leadership, and communal discernment receive less attention than institutional stability and legal compliance. Leadership tends to become more centralized, and caution often replaces participation. This shift does not happen through a deliberate rejection of Anabaptist theology. It grows out of fear and pressure, where survival takes priority over formation; it develops slowly under conditions of fear, pressure, and the need to survive.

At the same time, identity is driven not only by fear but also by social aspiration. Many Mennonite missions were originally rooted in remote regions through humanitarian work. Today, younger generations move to cities for higher

education and employment. In urban settings, church belonging is often shaped more by visibility, size, and perceived success than by theological conviction.

As a minority tradition rooted largely among marginalized communities, the Anabaptist church often carries limited social status. In a society shaped by aspiration, many Christians are drawn to leaders and churches that represent higher social or economic standing. Popular and highly visible churches appear more attractive than smaller traditions shaped by service and discipleship. As a result, credibility is measured through class, education, or public visibility rather than by shared theological convictions.

A Theological Question: Faithfulness Under Conditions of Insecurity

The dynamics described above raise a theological question for Anabaptist churches in India. They also show why Friesen and Friesen's anthropological concerns remain relevant twenty-five years later. They warned that power, resources, and institutional structures would continue to shape authority even after mission leadership was transferred. The Indian experience shows that these tensions did not disappear; they were internalized within the life of the church itself.

Churches in the Global South are often encouraged to learn from the first-century church and from the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, who also lived in vulnerable communities. Indian Anabaptist churches value this heritage and desire to follow these models. However, the comparison has limits. Unlike those earlier communities, Indian Anabaptist churches inherited institutions that require ongoing engagement with legal systems, political authorities, and public regulation. Because of this, the church's relationship to power is not only one of vulnerability, but also of administration.

At the same time, these institutions emerged within communities shaped by long historical insecurity. Leadership responsibility was transferred before trust and formation could mature. Over time, authority became closely linked to resources, education, and institutional protection. As public moral space narrowed and social aspiration increased, stability and credibility began to be valued more than vulnerability and shared discernment.

Taken together, these conditions raise a deeper question: What happens to Anabaptist ecclesiology when insecurity, institutional responsibility, and the search for legitimacy together shape how authority is exercised? When survival depends on protecting resources, maintaining public credibility, and navigating legal systems, how can practices of shared leadership, communal discernment, mutual accountability, and peace witness be sustained?

The question is therefore not simply whether institutions are good or bad. It is whether faithfulness to Christ can remain rooted in vulnerability and communal

obedience when the church must also act as an administrative and protective body. Faithfulness in such a context may lie in learning how to exercise necessary authority without allowing insecurity, resources, or the search for legitimacy to quietly redefine the life of the church.

Conclusion: Continuing the Conversation Faithfully

Friesen and Friesen's essay continues to speak meaningfully twenty-five years later. The Indian Anabaptist experience helps explain why the tensions they identified—around power, partnership, peace witness, and discernment—have not disappeared.

Histories of caste exclusion created deep insecurity. Leadership responsibility was transferred before healing and formation were complete. Over time, wealth, land, education, and institutions became tied to dignity and authority. As moral credibility narrowed, political suspicion grew, and legal vulnerability shaped fear. At the same time, social aspiration and migration reshaped how authority and theological voice were recognized.

This essay does not seek to correct Friesen and Friesen. It extends their questions from a context where mission transition did not remove power tensions but relocated them within the church itself. It suggests that anthropology must attend not only to cultural difference in mission, but also to how insecurity and aspiration reshape authority, silence, and theological formation within the church.

If anthropology is to serve Anabaptist mission in India today, it must take these realities seriously. It must examine how institutional inheritance, legal vulnerability, and social aspiration shape the exercise of authority and the internal life of churches. At the same time, anthropology must help communities name these dynamics honestly—how fear and insecurity reorganize power, and how the search for legitimacy reshapes identity.

Only then can churches begin to discern how practices of shared leadership, communal listening, and peace witness may be sustained within the structures they have inherited. Such renewal will not be quick. Yet it may be through this slow process that the church learns again how to follow Christ faithfully under conditions of insecurity.

Anabaptist Missiology: Ecclesiological Considerations¹

Lois Y. Barrett

Your spellchecker may not accept the word “missional,” but in many church circles it describes a particular kind of missiology and ecclesiology. The purpose of this presentation is to propose a description of the term “missional church,” using it here to describe the church’s character as an alternative community sent by God to proclaim and to be a sign of the reign of God. Though the term was not in common usage in sixteenth-century Europe, many characteristics of what we refer to today as “missional church” were present in the early Anabaptist movement. This will become clearer as we examine the term and apply it to Anabaptist understandings of the central role of the church in God’s reconciling work in the world.

Early Anabaptism Was at Its Core a Missional Church Movement

Despite its not being in every dictionary, “missional” is not a new word. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces its beginnings to 1907, although at that time the word was simply a synonym for the adjective “missionary” and did not carry the connotations of the present essay. Contemporary understandings of the word “missional” begin in the 1950s with the International Missionary Council’s discussions of the concept of *missio Dei* (the mission of God). The emphasis was on the mission as God’s, not the church’s, and on the church, participating in the *missio Dei*, as missionary by its very nature.

1 This essay was presented as “Anabaptist Missiology: Ecclesiological Considerations” at the first gathering of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists (AAM) in January 2000 at Techny Towers, north of Chicago, IL. It was later edited and published under the title “Defining Missional Church,” in *Roman Catholic, Evangelicals, and Anabaptists in Conversation*, edited by James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles van Engen (Orbis Books, 2006), 177–183. It has been adapted here and used with permission in its current form.

British Reformed missionary Lesslie Newbigin traced the frequent use of the phrase *missio Dei* to the World Missionary Conference at Willingen in 1952.² In that usage of the term in the 1950s and 1960s, invoking a trinitarian theology often meant emphasizing the first and third persons for the concept of *missio Dei* to connote God's support of all kinds of secular social and political movements, whether or not they had a basis in faith in Jesus Christ. The stress was on how God was working outside the church and on the responsibility of Christians to join God in that work.

Newbigin himself, a missionary in India who had come back to Britain to discover a mission field at home, was much more careful in promoting a trinitarian mission. He defined Christian mission as proclaiming the kingdom of the Father, sharing the life of the Son, and bearing the witness of the Spirit.³ He wrote:

By proclaiming the reign of God over all things the church acts out its faith that the Father of Jesus is indeed ruler of all. The church, by inviting all human-kind to share in the mystery of the presence of the kingdom hidden in its life through its union with the crucified and risen life of Jesus, acts out the love of Jesus that took him to the cross. By obediently following where the Spirit leads, often in ways neither planned, known, nor understood, the church acts out the hope that it is given by the presence of the Spirit who is the living foretaste of the kingdom.⁴

Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder was also connecting early on with the discussion of *missio Dei* in the ecumenical world, particularly in the writings of Dutch ecumenist W. A. Visser 't Hooft, and most particularly his understanding of the church in mission as distinctive from the world, no longer bound by Constantinian understandings of the relationship of church to state and society. In a lecture in 1964, Yoder said,

The three marks of the church in mission to which Dr. Visser 't Hooft pointed [a witnessing body, a serving body, and a body fellowshiping voluntarily and visibly] were all defined with reference to its distinct nature as church; not by the identification of the church with the total society but rather in its distinctness from it. The presuppositions of a relevant witness or ministry are a distinctiveness, a "having crossed over"; otherwise, there is nothing to offer. Mission, then, is its witness to its distinctiveness, its calling, rather than to the church's own self-confidence.

When we confess that Christ is the light of the world this implies a critical attitude toward other pretended "lights." When we confess that Jesus Christ is

2 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Eerdmans, 1995), 18.

3 Ibid., 29.

4 Ibid., 64–65.

Lord, this commits us to a relative independence of other loyalties, which we would otherwise feel it normal to be governed by.⁵

For Yoder, the connection between the church and mission was that the new Christian community, in which walls are broken down by the work of Christ, “is not only a vehicle of the gospel or a fruit of the gospel; it is the good news. It [the church] is not merely the agent of mission or the constituency of a mission agency. This is the mission.”⁶

Missiologist David Bosch continued in this vein of seeing the church as essentially missionary, noting that in 1 Peter 2:9, the church is not the sender but the one sent, and quoting Karl Barth in affirming that the church’s mission is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission.⁷ Mission is not an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.⁸ Moreover, the church “can be missionary only if its being-in-the-world is, at the same time, a being-different from the world.”⁹ Bosch covers, as well, the themes of ministry, trinitarian missiology, the *missio Dei*, and eschatology in relation to mission. Bosch does not use the term “missional church,” but rather “church-in mission” or “mission-centered church.”

In the 1970s and subsequently, other missiologists began using the adjective “missional” to refer to this concept of the church-in-mission and the church as sent by God to participate in God’s mission in the world. Mennonite missionary John Driver says he was using the equivalent Spanish word at least twenty-five years ago. And one finds other scattered uses of the word among Mennonite writers and elsewhere as an alternative to the adjective “missionary.”

The term “missional church” began to be used more broadly after the publication of the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* in 1998.¹⁰ Jointly written by six authors, the book was a project of the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America. The network itself grew out of conversations at the Ecumenical Mission Consultation at Madison, Connecticut, in October 1987, co-sponsored by the Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA and the US

5 John Howard Yoder, “Let the Church Be the Church,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Eerdmans, 1994), 171.

6 John Howard Yoder, “People in the World,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Eerdmans, 1994), 91; originally written in 1967.

7 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis Books, 1971), 372.

8 Ibid., 390.

9 Ibid., 386.

10 Darrell Guder, Lois Barrett, Inagrace Dietterich, George Hunsberger, Alan Roxburgh, and Craig Van Gelder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998).

Catholic Missions Association. From this discussion and from the example of the British Gospel and Our Culture Programme (inspired by Newbigin), a group of seven to eight people met at the end of the consultation and committed themselves to beginning an informal network in the United States and Canada whose purpose would be to encourage “a missionary encounter of the gospel with our North American culture.” This was followed by a meeting at Princeton Seminary in October 1989 of Wilbert Shenk, Charles West, Craig Van Gelder, and George Hunsberger, who concluded that, among all the ways in which faith and culture issues were being addressed, the Gospel and Our Culture Network was uniquely aimed at the missiological dimensions of the issues. Others involved in the early meetings included Paul Hiebert, Lamin Sanneh, and William Willimon.¹¹

The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) began holding open meetings in the early 1990s and described itself as “a collaborative association of Christian leaders from diverse communions, working together to help the church explore and engage the newly emerging missionary encounter of the gospel in the cultures of North America.” In 1994 the GOCN received a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts for research and writing on the topic of a missionary ecclesiology. The project included conversations with Douglas John Hall, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and Justo Gonzalez. This project resulted in the jointly written book *Missional Church* in 1998. As the six authors searched for a book title that would describe our topic succinctly, we chose the term “missional church”—in part because we thought the word “missional” would signal a new paradigm different from that usually evoked by the word “missionary,” and in part because “missional” was not a common word and would make readers take a second look at what it might mean.

What Do We Mean by “Missional Church”?

The discussions around the missional church and its meanings have been carried forward by a variety of books in the Gospel and Our Culture Series.¹² In addition, the agenda of missional church has been carried forward by the Christian

11 George Hunsberger, “The Genesis of the Gospel and Our Culture Network,” unpublished paper, 1993.

12 See various titles found in the bibliography of the Krabill, Sawatsky, and Van Engen volume *Roman Catholic, Evangelicals, and Anabaptists in Conversation*, e.g., George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture* (1996); George Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit* (1998); Craig Van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness—Changing World* (1999); Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (2000); James Brownson, Inagrace Dietterich, Barry Harvey, and Charles West, *Storm Front: The Good News of God* (2003); Lois Barrett, Darrell Guder, Walter Hobbs, George Hunsberger, Linford Stutzman, Jeff Van Kooten, and Dale Ziemer, *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (2004).

Mission and Modern Culture Series, edited by Alan Neely, H. Wayne Pipkin, and Wilbert Shenk, and published by Trinity Press International, with some of the authors using missional terminology.¹³ The words and often the concept of missional church have also been picked up by denominational bodies, mid-level church governing bodies, mission agencies, other associations of churches and ministers outside of denominational structures, and church consulting agencies as expressing something about an alternative way of understanding the church-participating-in-God's-mission.

The following is a summary of what I understand "missional church" to mean, at the present state of the conversation. Anabaptists, past and present, will recognize these characteristics as core to the sixteenth-century free-church stream of history and as those for which many adherents both lived and died.

To Be Missional Is the Essential Nature and Vocation of the Church

There are, of course, other popular understandings of what it means to be the church in North America. Some still hold a quasi-Constantinian understanding of the church as chaplain to society. Others see the church as one more voluntary association in society, alongside the soccer club or the garden club; that is, in fact, the legal status of the churches in the United States and Canada. Or some might see the church as the waiting room for heaven for saved individuals. The most popular image of the church these days seems to be the church as vendor of religious goods and services.

Missional church theology sees the church as participating in the *missio Dei*. Thus, the mission is God's, first of all, not our own creation. Rather than seeing mission as one among many activities of the church, it sees participation in God's mission as permeating every activity of the church. Thus, all of the church's life is a witness to the gospel, whether it be its outreach or its life together. This cuts across the old divisions about whether the inner or outer life of the congregation is more important, or whether it is more important to pay attention to church discipline and discipling or to social action and evangelism. The making of disciples through catechesis and practices of continuing loving accountability is training for participation in God's mission. Sustained public witness is impossible unless it is undergirded by spiritual disciplines and practice in loving enemies.

Thus, the missional church conversation has intersected the conversation about practices as meaningful clusters of communal human activity and thinking that

13 Authors included David Bosch, Wilbert Shenk, Lesslie Newbigin, Lamin Sanneh, J. Andrew Kirk, Douglas John Hall, Judith M. Gundry-Volf and Miroslav Volf, Alan Roxburgh, Kenneth Cragg, Bert Hoedemaker, Jonathan R. Wilson, Gordon Scoville, James Brownson, and Barry Harvey.

need to be learned and are done over time.¹⁴ These practices are not just internal to the life of the congregation; they are witnessed by the watching world.¹⁵ These practices include baptism, the Lord's Supper, forgiveness, accountability, hospitality, prayer, watching over one another in love, how the church deals with conflict, and how it makes decisions. The missional church practices spiritual discernment as it seeks to understand its unique missional vocation within the *missio Dei*, so that all its communal behaviors are focused on living out that vocation.

In one sense, this understanding of the missional church provides an alternative to the discussion of the traditional *notae*, or marks, of the church. In answer to the question "Where can one truly find the church?" one has not a short (Word and sacraments) or long list (see Menno Simons's list of six ways whereby the church of Christ may be known¹⁶), but a unitive understanding of how all those "marks" hold together in ways that do not pit one aspect of the church's life against another.

To Be Missional Is to Pay Attention to the Church's Context

An early impetus to the missional church conversation was recognition of the changing status of the mainline churches in North America. Constantinian understandings of the church and its relation to government and culture have been disintegrating in many church circles (although it seems that some in evangelical circles wish for a return of Constantinianism, albeit with their own agendas). Mainline churches—and to some degree, all Christian churches—are experiencing something of the marginalization that the heirs of the Radical Reformation have been experiencing since the sixteenth century. As one bishop wistfully said to me a few years ago, "We just don't have access to the governor's office the way we used to." When I mention this conversation to Mennonite audiences, they typically laugh, because most Mennonites don't expect to have much access to government offices, and they recognize that the mainline churches are now joining them on the margins of influence. The bishop was not laughing, but some of his colleagues in other denominations are wondering whether the margins are not a better place to be, after all.

The decline of the church's influence in society has been a major factor in the church's willingness to see North America as a mission field. Mission is no longer only across salt water or among the down-and-out of North America. Mission is

14 See Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Eerdmans, 2002), 11.

15 Note the subtitle of John H. Yoder's book *Body Politics: Five Practices of Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Discipleship Resources, 1992).

16 Menno Simons, "Reply to Gellius Faber," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Herald Press, 1956), 734–44.

also to the dominant culture. Missional churches do not assume that their country is a Christian nation or even that most residents of the country are Christian. Every context is a missionary context.

Freed of the need to make things come out “right” for the government or society or to feel at home in the culture, the missional church can live out its understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church can have a different worldview. It can become an alternative community. It is different from the world, not for the sake of being different, but because it is seeking to conform to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, rather than to conform to the surrounding culture.

So, the church is a people. It is a communal body, rather than a collection of saved individuals whose primary identity and loyalties are outside the church. As Rodney Clapp has written:

God the Father and God the Son are not fundamentally known privately and ethereally. They are instead encountered through a holy people, a community set apart, a light to the world, a city on a hill, a tribe bearing promise to all other tribes. Christians are inescapably called to the corporate witnessing of the coming of God’s kingdom in Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Evangelism in a non-Constantinian setting requires that evangelism be understood not simply as declaring a message to someone but as initiation into the world-changing reign of God. The convert must understand that they are becoming a member of a new race, humanity, or family.¹⁸

Worship in a missional setting casts a new worldview. Worshipers enter a different reality—a preview of the reign of God. As in Orthodox worship, worship on earth is to be according to the pattern of heaven.

The church has no message to the world if it is just like the world. That differentness from the world is shown in its worship, in its common life, and in its public witness. In its encounter with the dominant culture, the church may sometimes be *affirming* of that culture—the ways in which it supports justice or peace or right relationships among people. The church may sometimes be *nonconforming*, acting and speaking out of a different worldview. It may sometimes *propose* to parts of society or government actions that move it closer to Jesus’s way—what Yoder called “middle axioms”—not Jesus’s way of living, but principles that bring one closer to it. The church will always seek to *demonstrate* the Jesus way, to be a sign of God’s future. The church is to be what Mennonite theologian Larry Miller has termed “messianic microsocieties present in and daily interacting with the existing sociopolitical order.”¹⁹

17 Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (InterVarsity, 1996), 109.

18 Ibid., 167.

19 Larry Miller, “The Church as Messianic Society: Creation and Instrument of Transformed Mission,” in *The Transfiguration of Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Herald

To Be Missional Is to Proclaim and to Be a Living Sign of the Gospel

The witness of the missional church is always grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, initiated by God, and led by the Holy Spirit. The good news that Jesus proclaimed, as recorded in the Gospels, was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mark 1:15). The kingdom of heaven, or reign of God, is that sphere in which God is ruler and God’s way of doing things is practiced. We know that sphere now in part; we believe that one day God’s victory will be obvious to the whole world, and God’s peace and justice will prevail. The church is called to continue Jesus’s ministry (“as the Father has sent me, so I send you” [John 20:21]), to continue to proclaim the reign of God, both near at hand and yet to come. The church is called to align itself with God’s in-breaking future and to be a preview of the age to come.

This all assumes God as an actor—past, present, and future. God is more than a clockmaker who set the world in motion and then went on to something else. God is more than a ground of being. The missional church celebrates God’s actions in the past. It points to God’s action in the present; one of my colleagues refers to Christians’ calling to be “detectives of divinity.” It expects God’s action in the future. It depends on the Holy Spirit to come through with glimpses of God’s future in the present. This is the foundation of the spirituality of the missional church—its reliance on the Spirit, its expectation that prayer will make a difference, its desire to do the will of God above all else.

In the missional church, Jesus—his is life, death, and resurrection—is normative for Christian behavior. When Jesus is not the norm, all kinds of things get attributed to God; all kinds of behaviors are justified. The missional church takes seriously Jesus’s words “Take up your cross and follow me.” It knows that suffering or even death can result from following Jesus. Not everybody will like you all the time. It assumes that Jesus’s commands are to be obeyed. It expects God’s vindication through resurrection, which it can already count on because of Jesus’s resurrection from the dead.

Disciples in the missional church let the Bible form and shape them. Newbigin emphasized that for the churches of Western, post-Christendom culture to be genuinely missionary, they must learn again to indwell the “plausibility structure” of the Bible.²⁰ The Bible is not simply a book to be studied but a world in which to live.

In such a church, evangelization is not confined to the initial hearing and acceptance of the gospel. Evangelization is a full spectrum that includes the first hearing/seeing of the gospel, catechesis, baptism, continuing formation and

Press, 1993), 130.

20 Cited by George Hunsberger in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, eds. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Eerdmans, 1996), xvi.

discipling, mutual accountability, and training for witness. To be evangelized, to be “gospelled,” is to be formed into the image of Christ as witness to the reign of God.

“Missional Church” Is Shorthand for Talking About a Particular Ecclesiology

In this ecclesiology, mission first constitutes the church. God’s mission creates the church and gives the church its reason for being. Second, the missional church is an alternative community, engaging with, but not conforming to, the surrounding cultures. It is conformed instead to Jesus Christ. Third, the missional church points to the reign of God, depending on God’s action in the past, present, and future. Anabaptists have not always lived up faithfully to their missional calling, but when they are at their best, they will find deep resonance with the ecclesial missiology articulated by the missional church movement.

An Ethiopian Response: “Repositioning the Role of the Church in God’s Mission”

Ruth Haile Gelane

It seems that we are in an era when the church often finds itself entangled with secular power and state structures and when many people see this alignment as the church’s mission in the world. Such an association with power often distorts the church’s true mission—revealed through Jesus Christ—and consequently diminishes the Church’s witness. It is within this tension that Lois Y. Barrett’s article on Anabaptist missiology, “Ecclesiological Considerations,” provides a comprehensive exploration of the church’s identity as a participant in the *missio Dei*, God’s ongoing mission.

Barrett explores the trajectory of the concept’s historical development from its theological roots to its contemporary understanding. She traces the term “missional” to 1907 and states that it was initially used as an adjective for “missionary.” Barrett’s exploration shows that the trajectory moves from “mission” (something we do), which historically in the church was linked to Constantinian understandings of the relationship between church and state, to *missio Dei*—God’s mission, in which we participate. Her central thesis emphasizes that the church must shift from a model of cultural dominance—something that early Anabaptists understood very clearly—to one of engagement as an authentic, alternative community rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In my reflections here, I will engage with Barrett’s primary arguments regarding the church’s identity as a participant in the *missio Dei*. I will explore what the “missional church” means and then examine Barrett’s call for the church “to be.” While I build on Barrett’s missional framework, I will argue that missional church must move beyond symbolic presence toward a strategic engagement and the use of prophetic voices directed at societal and structural forms of injustice by examining the broader themes and relevance this might have on the contemporary

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church. I will in addition provide a contextual example from the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia by illustrating its mission perspective.

Defining the Church's Role in God's Mission

Barrett's emphasis on the shift from *mission* to *missio Dei* offers a vital perspective. She states that the emphasis is on the mission as *God's*, not as that of the *church*. The church, then, is missionary by its very nature by participating in God's mission, the *missio Dei*. This illustrates clearly the shift from a church-centered mission to participation in God's mission and highlights the importance of understanding mission as established in *God's* activity rather than resulting from *human* effort.

Barrett defines "missional church" by offering three points that explore what it means to be missional.

Primary Purpose

First, she says, to be missional describes the very nature and essential vocation of the church. The primary purpose of the church, then, is to participate in God's mission (*missio Dei*). This means seeing every aspect of the church's life—from worship and sacraments to social justice and community discipline—as an active participation in God's ongoing mission. The church's practices are not a routine, but a witness to the gospel. This idea challenges the traditional way of defining mission and offers a way of thinking and seeing the church as the primary instrument of God's mission in the world, integrating all activities holistically and discerning the church's essential nature and vocation within God's mission.

Context

Second, according to Barrett, to be missional is to pay attention to the church's context. Barrett emphasizes viewing the North American church's marginalized position as an opportunity to be a faithful witness that can offer a compelling identity in contemporary society. Her assertion that churches are no longer centers of cultural power but are instead called to embody the gospel faithfully from the margins challenges the church to see its current state as a tactical benefit rather than a hindrance. I believe that this aligns with the Mennonite perspective on the separation of church and state, as well as with a missional perspective and participation in mission that does not succumb to the temptation of cultural dominance.

However, this view can raise critical questions. While being on the margins can foster a sense of community and reliance on God, the question becomes how the church can engage with societal structures for justice and transformation as a body of witness. How can a church, as a participant in God's mission and a community in the margins, be a beacon of peace, hope, and justice as it embodies

the love and reconciliation of Jesus? What distinctive elements can define its identity as a prophetic and compassionate community in society?

As Barrett states, the church is an “alternative community.” The question this statement raises is: How does this community embody different values and live out the gospel in tangible ways? While Barrett’s perspective encourages paying attention to the church’s context to be missional, I believe it should be strengthened by strategic engagement and the exercise of a prophetic voice to remain relevant as a change agent in society. What I mean by strategic engagement is that the church should be thoughtful in addressing the marginalized, the oppressed, and all people by choosing the Jesus way and using a prophetic voice to show solidarity with all people.

To underscore this shift, Dutch ecumenist Willem Visser ‘t Hooft articulated a similar view to Barrett, stating that when the church in mission is distinct from the world, it is no longer bound by Constantinian understandings of the relationship of church to state and society. This perspective emphasizes a meaningful move away from the church’s traditional alliance with power, principalities, and social dominance. That is why Barrett emphasizes paying attention to the church context given the shift, as the church freely embodies Jesus’s love and compassion in its engagement with society.

As the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states, “The church is called to live as an alternative culture within the surrounding society. Thus, the church is involved in cross-cultural mission whether it reaches out to people of the majority culture, to people of minority cultures within the society, or to various cultural groups in other countries.”¹ This embodying of the gospel involves engaging with various cultural settings and reaching out to marginalized groups with an approach that is rooted in Jesus’s love, peace, reconciliation, and hope. I believe this essential way of engagement to be a prophetic witness, lived out in words and deeds in society.

Proclamation and a Living Sign

Third, to be missional, according to Barrett, is to proclaim and to be a living sign of the gospel. I appreciate how Barrett articulates the theological foundations of a missional church—centered on the gospel, the kingdom of God, and reliance on the Holy Spirit as the foundation of the church’s mission. Her emphasis on viewing God as actively involved in the past, present, and future provides ongoing engagement with creation—and with the centrality of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection to Christian identity and practice. Additionally, Barrett highlights

1 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, ed. by the General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church General Board (Herald Press, 1995), 44–45.

that reliance on the Holy Spirit is essential to mission and spirituality and nurtures the church in strengthening her witness in society.

I also believe that this invites the Church to think about how to translate this vision into diverse cultural, social, and political contexts. Is proclaiming the gospel enough, or does the church also need concrete actions of justice, reconciliation, and community transformation? These questions emphasize the practical challenges the church faces in participating in God's mission and embodying Jesus's teaching as a witness in society. It encourages reflection on how the church faithfully interprets and embodies the teaching of Jesus, both internally as a faith community and externally as a witness to society. How, then, does the church navigate the tension between hope in a future fulfillment and active engagement in present suffering and systemic injustice?

Barrett emphasizes the church's fundamental role as a community—namely, to participate in God's mission (*missio Dei*). She advocates for an understanding of the church as an alternative community that embodies the gospel and Jesus's love, peace, and justice, and engages holistically in mission through its practices and identity. Building on her insights, I am particularly interested in exploring how this theological vision manifests itself within the Ethiopian context, especially through the mission of the Meserete Kristos Church.

The Meserete Kristos Church: A Case Study of a Church in Mission

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) seeks to be a missionary church empowered by the Holy Spirit to expand God's kingdom. This vision is implemented through a mission dedicated to the holistic preaching of the gospel and the rigorous discipleship of all who come to faith in Jesus Christ. At the core of MKC is a conviction that the missional church approach must be holistic. This is reflected in strategic goals that balance effective pastoral ministry and leadership equipping with the promotion of justice and peace, and the provision of services that address the community's needs, as revealed in practice. MKC manifests an ecclesiology in which "service" is not a separate department but an essential witness to the gospel. MKC's efforts in social justice, relief, and cross-border missions exemplify the contextual engagement that Barrett highlights in her article.

As someone who grew up in MKC and actively participated in evangelism programs organized by the local church at various times, I have observed a mixed understanding of what "mission" truly requires within the community. First, the church affirms its participation in God's ongoing mission, and second, there is an emphasis on one-to-one evangelism, with church leaders encouraging members to participate, stating that evangelism is not only for full-time ministers. Both methods of evangelism—full-time and lay-driven—are supported and acknowledged

by the church, and this involves a scheduled program and prayer before going out to the community.

While mission in one-to-one encounters demonstrates a commitment, it also reflects a somewhat fragmented understanding of the nature of mission, because it tends to focus on individuals rather than on the collective, ecclesial participation in God's mission. The dual perspectives invite us to think thoroughly and reflect on how MKC understands and practices its role as a church participating in God's mission, both collectively and individually. Barrett's emphasis on the church's participation in the *missio Dei* highlights the importance of the church's collective identity as the main instrument of God's mission. The church's practices—worship, justice, service, and community life—are integral to its mission and must be fostered within a shared ecclesial identity.

From a biblical and theological perspective, the New Testament consistently presents the church—the body of Christ—as the central agent in God's mission (Eph 3:10). The church is called as a collective to be a witness, to embody Jesus's love and compassion, and to advocate and preach peace, justice, and reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–20). If church leaders, pastors, and members fail to understand mission as a collective and focus primarily on it as an individual act of evangelism, the church neglects the corporate ecclesial dimension that scripture emphasizes. However, the church is a collective of individuals. Each one is vital for participating in God's mission, keeping in mind serving within the larger vision of the church as it functions as the body of Christ and as a collective that is called to embody Jesus's teaching and to be a witness in society.

Generally, Barrett's article provides a strong theological foundation for viewing the church as God's instrument in mission and participating in God's mission (*missio Dei*). Her article challenges traditional ways of thinking and illuminates the shift in the church's mission and ecclesiological vision, positioning the church as the primary instrument of God's mission. Barrett also invites us to think more deeply and thoroughly about what we mean when we say that the church is "missional."

Anabaptist Missiology: Leadership Trends¹

Wilbert R. Shenk

Introduction

Rather quickly after its emergence at the turn of the nineteenth century the modern mission movement adopted a basic model and methods. By 1820 it was assumed that missionary work consisted of a constellation of activities: preaching, education, Bible translation, and publishing. These activities were carried out using certain principles of mission. It was recognized that many questions concerning effective mission work remained unanswered, but this basic model was not at issue. This combination of model, methods, and principles was soon institutionalized as the “mission compound” and became the classical mission model.²

In spite of the fact that the classical model of mission had come under increasing critical scrutiny after 1900, the vast majority of mission boards and missionaries at the end of World War II remained committed to the classical model. A minority of mission leaders, influenced by such critics as Roland Allen (1868–1947), recognized that this model had become a burdensome liability.³ Yet

1 This presentation by Wilbert R. Shenk was one of four papers presented at the inaugural meeting of the Association of Anabaptist Missiologists (AAM) at Techny Towers north of Chicago, IL, in January 2000. It was entitled “Anabaptist Missiology: Leadership Trends” and was later edited and published as “Leadership of Mennonite Mission, 1945–1885” in *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 8 (2000): 43–53. Shenk was a longtime administrator at Mennonite Board of Missions, the editor of *Mission Focus*, and, at the time of the 2000 presentation, had been named the Paul E. Pierson Professor of Mission History and Culture at Fuller Seminary School of World Mission, Pasadena, California.

2 For greater precision I prefer to call this the *modern* mission model, for it is based on the values and ideals of modernity.

3 The institutional weight of the model was considerable. Even though attempts were made periodically to revive conviction for the indigenous ideal, e.g., John Ritchie, *The Indigenous Church Principles in Theory and Practice* (Revell Company, 1946), the basic model remained largely unquestioned.

attempts to reform the system were generally not welcomed—by missionaries, mission boards, and supporting constituencies.

This presentation is limited to the period since 1945 and will be divided into three phases: 1945–1965, *postcolonial*; 1965–1975, *retrenchment*; 1975–1985, *restructuring*.

Postcolonial Phase: 1945–1965

The usual interpretation of North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ missions in the post-World War II era emphasizes the rapid program development, especially between 1945 and 1960. On these grounds we can justifiably call this the “golden age” of Mennonite missions. From 1945 to 1960 an unprecedented fifty-three new missions were founded with a view to the establishment of viable new churches. The present profile of the worldwide Mennonite and Brethren in Christ owes a great deal to this seminal period.

During this period the conditions for such development were especially favorable, for a number of reasons: (1) sizeable financial reserves had been accumulated during the war years when the sending of new missionaries had to be curtailed; (2) a large number of new missionary candidates were available; (3) the supporting churches demonstrated growing interest in missions; and (4) new opportunities in many countries where Mennonite missions had not worked in the past were opening up. This missionary expansion was linked in a number of instances to Mennonite Central Committee’s relief work following World War II, but the mission agencies were self-consciously attempting to extend into areas where they had not worked in the past.

The argument I wish to make here is that the central issue facing Mennonite and Brethren in Christ missions in 1945 was not how to cope with a new wave of mission expansion. Rather, the most pressing strategic issue was what to do with the now-defunct “colonial mission model.” This was not simply a matter of maintaining existing programs based on the bankrupt classical model. Even more urgent was the question of what the future model would be. The issue was patently clear in geopolitical terms. In August 1945 Indonesian nationalists declared their independence from the Dutch—and won that independence four years later. In August 1947 the British granted political independence to India and Pakistan. This sent a strong signal that the days of the European colonial empires were numbered. Although overshadowed to some extent by the Cold War, this was nonetheless one of the priority concerns on the international agenda for the next two decades.⁴

⁴ One way to follow the discussion of the “colonial” question is to study the volumes of the *International Review of Missions* during the decade of the 1950s.

No development during this time was more troubling than the so-called “loss” of China. The communists wrested control of China from Chiang Kai-shek’s forces in 1949 and quickly moved to expel all foreign influences, including missionaries, from its soil. It should be recalled that starting with Robert Morrison in 1807 Christian missions had had a difficult time gaining entrance to China in the first place, and when missions finally secured permission to be in China it was under the questionable legal umbrella provided by the unequal treaties forced on China by the Western powers around 1860. The “closing of China” in 1949 inflicted a severe trauma on the missionary movement, from which it recovered only gradually.⁵

Two Mennonite mission leaders of the period from 1945 to 1965 stand out because of their discerning reading of the times and their constructive attempts to develop a new model for their missions. J. D. Graber (1900–1978) and J. B. Toews (1906–1998) were not uniformly successful in their efforts, but they were clear-sighted, courageous, and creative in their leadership.

It might be asked whether Orie O. Miller (1892–1977) does not merit inclusion in this list. He became executive secretary of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions (EMBM)⁶ in 1935. As assistant executive secretary he led the establishment of EMBM’s first overseas mission in Tanganyika (later Tanzania) in 1934. However, Miller did not have to face in the 1940s and 1950s the same administrative challenges as Graber and Toews. Miller liked to say that he was following J. D. Graber’s administrative lead closely in order to avoid creating the problems in Tanganyika that Graber faced in India. Miller was certainly well informed and sufficiently concerned to stay abreast of the rapidly changing situation in terms of mission strategy.⁷ For example, he attended the periodic assemblies of the International Missionary Council, at his own initiative, in order to stay in touch with developments in the world church, something for which he could not have received formal authorization from his board at that time.

J. D. Graber was elected general secretary of the Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) in 1944, the first full-time administrator of the board.⁸ Until this time, the administration was handled by the board treasurer, a paid staff position, and the secretary, who served on an honorary part-time basis. With the appointment of Graber, a significant change in administrative outlook was instituted.

5 See David M. Paton, *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God* (SCM Press, 1953), an important, if somewhat stringent analysis of the closing of China.

6 Now Eastern Mennonite Missions.

7 See Paul Erb, *Orie O. Miller: The Story of a Man and an Era* (Herald Press, 1969), chapter 9.

8 So far as I have been able to determine, Graber is the first Mennonite/Brethren in Christ mission secretary to have served as a long-term missionary prior to appointment to administrative responsibility.

He brought to this new position seventeen years of experience in India, where he had followed the rising nationalist movement for political independence and was aware of what this implied for the future of the church. He had been present when a team from the National Christian Council of India conducted a survey and evaluated the Mennonite mission in Madhya Pradesh in 1937 and concluded in their report: “If there is any mission station where this [classical mission] theory has been given a thorough, devoted, intelligent trial, that mission is the American Mennonite, and that station is Dhamtari.”⁹ Nonetheless, the visiting team was highly critical of the results and recommended an overhaul of the mission’s methods.

Graber came to his work with a clear understanding of the times. He was committed to the reform of existing programs but was even more determined to avoid starting new missions based on the classical model. This meant avoiding the founding of large-scale institutions as the basis for missionary work.¹⁰ He emphasized that no mission compounds were to be established in the future. One way he attempted to prevent this from happening was to deploy missionaries more widely, thus discouraging the build-up of large institutional programs in centers.

The major test of Graber’s administration was the mission in India. Here he faced a group of his longtime missionary colleagues who strongly resisted all attempts to change the existing patterns,¹¹ on the one hand, and Indian church leaders, on the other, who were chafing under missionary control and demanded that leadership of the church be transferred to them. With the backing of the Mission Board, in 1948 Graber was able to override missionary opposition and set in motion a multiphase process that eventually resulted in the transfer of all leadership to Indians, dismantled mission structures, and arranged for the disposal of all mission properties. Although the MBM mission in Argentina was not as highly institutionalized, similar steps were followed there under the administrative guidance of Nelson Litwiller, MBM secretary for Latin America until 1967.

Graber’s vision was not simply that of dismantling and closing down a mission. In 1965 at the MBM annual meeting in his keynote address, Graber sketched out his vision for a new stage of “Partners in World Mission,” a call for the development of partnerships between the church in North America and the emerging

9 J. W. Pickett, A. L. Warnhuis, G. H. Singh, and D. A. McGavran, *Church Growth and Group Conversion* (Lucknow Publishing House, 1962; first ed., 1938), 67.

10 Graber took the lead in arranging for William and Marie Reyburn to evaluate the program in the Argentine Chaco in 1954, which led to the dismantling of the conventional institutional program and an innovative approach being set in motion. See William and Marie Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco* (MBMC, 1954). For a summary of this case, see Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Orbis Books, 1999), chapter 5.

11 This was not the view of all the missionaries. Younger missionaries embraced Graber’s vision of a new model.

churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹² In 1965, discussions were underway between MBM and the Mennonite churches in Argentina and Japan to partner in new mission ventures. Before Graber retired in 1967, Japan Mennonite Church and MBM were jointly sponsoring one Japanese Mennonite couple who served a Japanese-language program at HCJB in Quito, Ecuador.

J. B. Toews served on the administrative staff of the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions and Services from 1953 to 1963, first as promotional secretary and then as general secretary. As a member of the board in 1952 Toews had visited Africa, meeting not only with Mennonite Brethren missionaries but canvassing missions in several countries. He was impressed that “two centuries of colonialism had come to an end and all the colonies of western Europe were crying for independence. Around the world old political structures were being dismantled. . . . A new era in the history of missions was dawning.”¹³ In reporting to the board late that year, Toews recommended a review of all board programs in India, Africa, and South America with a view to introducing basic changes. The following year he was appointed to the staff.

Looking back on that period, Toews observed that “Mennonite Brethren missions in 1953 can be understood only in the context of a colonial system where each missionary or group of missionaries functioned as an independent entity. . . . Mennonite Brethren mission program was still based on the concept of the mission station as the center of operational outreach.”¹⁴ In an address to the Mennonite World Conference in 1962, Toews noted that “we are living in an era of great cultural and national awakening. Man’s spirit is rising to an awareness of his dignity and is demanding freedom.”¹⁵ But the old pattern of mission remained firmly in control. The field mission structure had the final word on administrative decisions. Missionaries answered neither to the mission board nor, more importantly, to the national church. Every attempt Toews made to introduce reform was frustrated by this fact of missionary autonomy. The missionary system efficiently insulated the missionary from accountability to anyone, including the mission board. Toews ended his service as general secretary in 1963 in despair. He saw clearly what needed to be done, both in terms of reconceptualizing the mission task and revising the structures. But even with his considerable leadership skill and moral authority, Toews failed to challenge the system.

In summary, it may be observed that clear vision alone is insufficient. Structures of decision-making and accountability must be in place to support

12 J. D. Graber, “Partners in World Mission,” *Missions 1965* (MBMC, 1965), 11–23.

13 J. B. Toews, *JB: A Twentieth-Century Mennonite Pilgrim* (Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1995), 154.

14 *Ibid.*, 159.

15 J. B. Toews, “The Ministry of the Church in Missions,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (1962): 225.

program implementation. If adequate structures are lacking, the agency cannot implement programs effectively or introduce change as the environment changes.

Retrenchment Phase: 1965–1975

By 1960 the wave of mission expansion overseas by Mennonite and Brethren in Christ agencies had crested. Only ten new missions were launched during the decade of the 1960s. The dismantling of European colonial structures was in full flow and would be largely completed by 1970. In terms of the international economy, 1967—the endpoint of the post-World War II economic boom—has become the official benchmark year for comparing monetary values. By the late 1960s, agencies began to experience the tightening of budgets as inflation eroded buying power and the cost of living in urban centers skyrocketed worldwide.

Throughout this period, geopolitical thinking and relationships were in the firm grip of Cold War ideology. The war in Vietnam was a serious drag on morale and economy. Domestically, the United States was caught up in the Civil Rights struggle and the youth movement that was highly critical of institutions and authority. In terms of Christian mission, it was becoming evident that the mood in the churches was turning inward. Frequently, the question was put to mission agencies: Why are we continuing to spend so much money overseas when we have such urgent needs at home? The OPEC crisis in 1973/1974 further dampened the international economy and reinforced the tendency to look inward. The steady growth in missionary numbers that had become a staple of annual reports from the late forties through the fifties had largely stopped by the mid-sixties. Although the shift was not abrupt or drastic, from 1967 the number of missionaries was in decline.¹⁶

It is difficult to find a compelling idea that focuses the issues facing Mennonite and Brethren in Christ missions during this period. No one spoke of retrenchment, but this was increasingly the reality. When the Nigeria/Biafra war broke out in 1966, it forced the MBM to withdraw most of some thirty workers from that country; MBM was never able to regain the ground lost in terms of worker strength.

For some boards, the shift was precipitated by financial crisis. In 1967 the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions/Services was half a million dollars in debt and facing a mounting crisis of confidence. Vernon R. Wiebe was appointed general secretary with the mandate to address the situation. He reorganized the board and field programs and retired the debt. With the confidence of the constituent churches restored, the program was gradually rejuvenated. Vernon Wiebe noted that he had largely implemented the plan J. B. Toews had recommended

16 This refers only to mission agency personnel. Mennonite Central Committee's numbers continued to expand into the early 1980s.

to the board a decade earlier. By 1967 the board faced the choice of fundamental reform or going out of business.

Howard Habegger became executive secretary of the General Conference Commission on Overseas Mission (COM) in 1967. As he began his tenure, he led the commission through a major review that resulted in a statement of goals, priorities, and strategies that guided COM over the next decade. Paul N. Kraybill, executive secretary of the EMBM since 1958, resigned in 1969, and Don Jacobs assumed a leading role in that board until he founded the Mennonite Christian Leadership Foundation.

Whereas the closing of China had happened abruptly, the closing of India was protracted. In 1948 Prime Minister Nehru personally took the decision that foreign missionaries would eventually be barred from entering India. By 1960, new visas for missionaries to India were increasingly difficult to secure, and by 1970, only missionaries with specialist qualifications in certain fields stood a chance of getting a visa. Between 1970 and 1975 scores of long-term missionaries left India, including a number of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ workers, thus largely completing the “closing of India” to long-term missionary service.¹⁷

As noted above, the closing of China in 1949 had sent tremors throughout the world of missions. In the heat of debate about the dismantling of colonial mission structures and the call that appeared as the title of a 1964 book, *Missionary, Go Home*,¹⁸ only Donald McGavran seemed to have a grand vision of what ought to be done. He insisted that rather than this being the “sunset of missions,” we were witnessing the “sunrise.”¹⁹ McGavran, of course, cast his vision in terms of making church growth the focal point of all missionary work. All Mennonite and Brethren in Christ missions were influenced, at least to some degree, by McGavran’s vision, but it was appropriated only in a piecemeal fashion.

One innovation pioneered by Mennonite missions, starting in the 1950s, was to work in partnership with indigenous Christian movements, first in Argentina, and then in Africa. Whatever the contribution Mennonites have made to these indigenous movements, this relationship has been of inestimable importance to Mennonites. In the first place, for this relationship to be productive, Mennonites had to rid themselves of all vestiges of the classical mission model and accept the discipline of allowing these indigenous groups to take the lead in setting the agenda. In the second place, it meant that Mennonites had to learn to play their

17 This has not meant the end of various short-term and other alternative forms of Christian service on the part of foreigners. But the old era was brought to an end.

18 James A. Scherer, *Missionary, Go Home* (Prentice-Hall, 1964), a balanced and constructive book not well served by its title.

19 Among McGavran’s most important works are *The Bridges of God* (Friendship Press, 1955); *How Churches Grow* (World Dominion Press, 1959); and *Understanding Church Growth* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1970).

role without benefit of the institutional infrastructure that had been associated with mission methodology in the past. (This was frequently a source of misunderstanding. Some indigenous groups expected that partnering with foreign bodies would open up channels to external financial and other resources.) The approach in each situation has had to be improvised on site.²⁰

One of those who contributed in important ways to this development has been James Bertsche, a longtime missionary in Zaire/Congo and then executive secretary of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM). His training in anthropology and long experience in Africa equipped him to offer sound guidance to missionaries who took up the challenge of serving with African indigenous churches.

In summary, the mood in wider society and constituency between 1965 and 1975 was one of retreat and retrenchment, an attitude reinforced by the tightening financial situation, social unrest at home, and the Vietnam debacle. Missions were still in the shadow of colonialism. The program development that most radically departed from the classical missions period was the ministries begun by Mennonite missions among indigenous Christian movements. The missiological significance of this experiment has not yet been fully explored.

Restructuring Phase: 1975–1985

It is obvious that both the dating and the designation of these stages are somewhat arbitrary. In the absence of adequate empirical data, it is difficult to establish what exactly was happening. By 1980 it was perceived that many of the agency structures were in need of overhaul. Thus, when Paul M. Gingrich became president of the Mennonite Board of Missions in 1980, the board went through a review of its structures that resulted in reorganization. Erwin Rempel, as executive secretary of the COM during the 1980s, led the commission through a careful program review and projection process. Similar restructuring happened in several other boards, including Eastern Mennonite Missions, usually in conjunction with a change in leadership. Boards and agencies need to keep pace with the times, and organizational change is a part of this adjustment process. But the “restructuring” that was needed was as much conceptual as organizational. It was easy enough to see that the time-honored structures and patterns were no longer effective; it was quite another matter to visualize what ought to replace them.

The immediate pressure in the 1980s was to streamline operations, since revenues were not keeping pace with inflation. Only five new missions were launched during the decade of the 1980s (only one of which was sponsored by

20 See Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Orbis Books, 1999), chapters 5 and 6; David A. Shank, *What Western Christians Can Learn from African-Initiated Churches*, Mission Insight series, no. 10, ed. James R. Krabill (Mennonite Board of Missions, 2000).

a North American Mennonite agency). A survey of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches carried out by Mennonite World Conference in late 1999, although incomplete, shows that by contrast, fifty new missions were founded in the 1990s, and over half were initiatives by churches outside North America and Western Europe.

From a missiological point of view, however, what is of primary interest is conceptual innovation or restructuring. In this regard, several developments will require further exploration and reflection: (a) multilateral partnerships (e.g., the Indonesian PIPKA); (b) theology of presence; and (c) witness in limited access areas.

Multilateral Partnerships

One of the most surprising developments in the past twenty-five years is the rise of the missionary movement from non-Western churches. Today, there are more than 5,000 Korean missionaries in service all over the world. And churches from various Asian, African, and Latin American countries are joining in this growing movement. Some of these new missions, lacking good historical perspective, are being carried on in a quite traditional—one could say “classical”—mission style, as a mission sponsored from one church with a view to establishing a church in another country. Others are being worked out as cooperative international or inter-agency initiatives.

Mennonite churches and agencies have been a part of this innovation. For purposes of illustration, I will cite here the case of PIPKA (Pengutusan Injil dan Pelayanan Kasih, or “mission and service”), the Indonesian agency related to the (Mennonite) Muria Christian Church (GKMI). Its original purpose was to promote evangelization in the major cities, starting in Jakarta. Gradually the vision grew, and workers began to be deployed more widely. In 1973 the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions/Services (BOMAS) and PIPKA entered into an agreement whereby BOMAS would work with PIPKA in the Missionary Training Center in Jakarta. Here are key points in the agreement reached by the two bodies:

1. First and foremost, we acknowledge that we are members of the same family (Eph 2:19). Hence it is only natural for us to join hands and work together as equals.
2. Our “partnership” is not to be understood in terms of shareholders but is based on the concept of family members helping one another, of the parts of the body all being essential to the well-being of the whole. The older and stronger are bound to help the weaker and younger.
3. There is room for diversity and differences, but these are not to be interpreted as disunity. Nor is there superiority or inferiority (1 Cor 12:14–26).

4. Any kind of work in our partnership is to strengthen, build, and mature the local churches, so that in turn they are equipped to grow and multiply.
5. The program decisions are to be made on the field (i.e., the Mennonite Brethren Board and/or their representatives are to help implement and achieve PIPKA's goals and not their own).²¹

Subsequently, the EMBM joined with PIPKA also and sent two missionary couples to work with PIPKA in church development in Kalimantan. This is not the only instance of such international Mennonite cooperation, but it is a significant experience and one that ought to encourage us to continue and expand such collaboration.

Theology of Presence

One of the persistent issues during the past fifty years has been how Christian witness might be carried out in situations where there is hostility to the Christian message. For example, the United Mission to Nepal—in which two Mennonite agencies have held membership—as a condition for being allowed to work in the country in 1954 had to agree that its workers would engage in no overt Christian evangelizing activity. This and similar situations elsewhere called for careful thought. The Anglican missionary statesman Max Warren initiated discussion of what he called a “theology of presence” in the 1960s; however, Warren’s proposal was roundly criticized by Donald McGavran, and among evangelicals “theology of presence” became suspect, in spite of the fact that it is a fundamental biblical theme.

In 1979 China began to open itself up to contacts with the West. In this initial stage, foreigners were treated with suspicion and proposed program relationships were met with hesitation. By 1981 it was clear that regular contacts with China might become possible. Goshen College established a Study-Service Trimester program in China, and then five Mennonite program agencies established the China Educational Exchange in 1982. It was evident that a more adequate theological basis was needed for Christian witness in circumstances where overt Christian evangelization was not possible. Under the aegis of the Council of International Ministries, a study was carried out in 1982. From those proceedings, Calvin Shenk wrote the pamphlet *A Relevant Theology of Presence*,²² which has been an important resource to Mennonite mission and service workers who must carry out their work in places where restrictions are placed on Christian activity.

21 Charles Christano, “PIPKA: An Indonesian Response to Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (October 1982): 171.

22 Calvin E. Shenk, *A Relevant Theology of Presence* (Mission Focus Pamphlet, 1982).

Limited Access Areas

In the 1980s, a number of Mennonite workers were sent into what have been called “limited access” areas. These are generally, but not exclusively, Muslim lands where Christian activity is forbidden. In the nature of the case, these workers and their activities are not publicized in the usual manner in church periodicals. My purpose here is simply to recognize this as an important innovation.

In summary, the period of 1975 to 1985 was a time of further decline in the number of missionary staff for most of our agencies as well as a loss of financial support in real dollar terms. Yet it has also been a period of some innovations. These may prove to be harbingers of the kind of missionary witness that will characterize the future.

An Indonesian Response: “From the East to the West and from Everywhere to Everywhere”

Andi O. Santoso

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14–15, NIV)

Introduction

Twelve years ago, I was struggling to discern whether I should continue my ministry as a local pastor serving with Pengutusan Injil dan Pelayanan Kasih (PIPKA, the Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia [GKMI] Board of Missions and Charities in Indonesia) or leave the congregation to engage in more mission-focused ministry. At that time, our family was also facing health challenges, as my second daughter was born with hearing impairment. Parallel to this personal struggle, I was involved in several ministries aimed at reaching unreached people groups in Indonesia, as well as in a humanitarian organization focused on community development, disaster preparedness, and the discipleship of young people through a short-term program. This was one of the darkest moments in our lives as a family, when we could not see what the future held. My passion has always centered on discipleship and holistic mission.

While I was wrestling with the possibility of leaving the pastorate in the local church, a significant encounter shaped my decision. I met a friend who was leading the Indonesian People’s Network, the largest network of organizations and churches committed to reaching unreached people groups. When I shared

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my struggle about whether I should leave the church to join mission work, he asked me, “Are you sure you want to leave the church, when all the resources for mission—people, money, and others—are in the church?” His question deeply challenged me. This pivotal conversation prompted me to take a two-month sabbatical leave. During that time, one of the phrases that came to my mind was, “from the East to the West.” I kept hearing the question in Romans 10:14–15, “How can people hear if no one preaches?” and the wonderful claim, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

A Journey of Missional Leadership in Indonesia and the Global Church

I ultimately chose to remain in the congregation, and through that decision, God led me to a new understanding of the church and mission within a broader framework. I was later nominated and elected as General Secretary of the GKMI Synod. Through this role, I began to engage in more diverse contexts. I traveled to many churches and listened to people’s stories and challenges as they followed Jesus and participated in his mission while also navigating different contexts and limitations.

I was invited to serve on the Mission Commission of the Mennonite World Conference from 2015 to 2021. Since then, I have become convinced that church and mission cannot be separated. At that time, our family had to move from East Java to Central Java, from the east to the west. One of my earlier involvements as PIPKA’s representative was participating in the Global Mission Fellowship meeting in Basel, Switzerland, in 2012, where I first encountered the Mission Commission of the Mennonite World Conference. Later, I attended the MERK (European Mennonite Regional Conference) in May 2012 in Sumiswald, Switzerland. This was a journey of crossing barriers—across cultures, at regional, national, and international levels.

During my ministry in the synod, I began to learn more about the history of GKMI, which was founded by a Chinese Indonesian believer named Tee Siem Tat. On December 6, 1920, twenty-five new believers were baptized by a Russian Mennonite missionary, Nicolai Thiessen, while Johann Hübert dedicated the children. This event later became known as the Kudus Movement. The movement gradually expanded to many other regions in Indonesia and eventually developed into what is now the GKMI Synod. On December 6, 2020, GKMI celebrated its 100th anniversary.

Today, GKMI has more than 16,000 members and continues to expand through numerous churches and mission branches across Indonesia.¹ GKMI

1 Lawrence M. Yoder, *The Muria Story: A History of Mennonite Mission in Java* (Pandora Press, 2006), 43–45.

is notable for embodying the principles of self-support, self-government, and self-extension. Unlike earlier missionary-led initiatives, GKMI represents a significant shift toward indigenous leadership and contextualized Christian expression, rooted in local initiative rather than foreign control.²

This journey has made me aware of differing understandings and practices of mission. Some view mission primarily in terms of evangelism, church planting, and the sending of missionaries abroad, while others understand mission more broadly as bearing witness through ministries of reconciliation and *diakonia*. In this essay, I reflect on my own lived experience as someone formed within GKMI and actively involved in PIPKA, and who now serves with Mennonite Mission Network (the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA) in the United States while continuing to engage Asian and Middle Eastern contexts, as well as through my voluntary work with the Deacons Commission of the Mennonite World Conference.

My journey extends to multiple locations of mission practice—from local Indonesian initiatives shaped by indigenous leadership to a Global North institutional setting that remains deeply connected to worldwide mission partnerships. This positioning allows me to live with both local and transnational perspectives, offering a unique point of view for examining how mission is practiced, negotiated, and reimaged across contexts.

In dialogue with Wilbert R. Shenk's analysis in "Anabaptist Missiology: Leadership Trends," I want to explore how my experience reflects the broader transition he identifies from colonial mission structures to more decentralized, participatory, and globally interconnected forms of mission. By bringing together personal narrative and missiological reflection, I will attempt to deepen understanding of how contemporary mission is shaped by the interaction among local agencies, global networks, and evolving partnerships.

The "Multilateral Partnership Model": The Formation of the Missionary Training Center in Jakarta, Indonesia, and a New Way of Doing Mission Together

Shenk's discussion of PIPKA in his article highlights a decisive shift in missiological thinking from externally controlled mission structures to locally grounded partnership. As he observes, "in PIPKA, mission is no longer directed by foreign agencies; rather, local churches define the goals, while external partners participate as equals in supporting that vision."³ This insight captures the essence of a profound transformation: Mission is no longer conceived as something carried

2 I. P. Asheervadam et al., *Churches Engage Asian Traditions*, Global Mennonite History Series: Asia (Good Books, 2011), 18.

3 Wilbert R. Shenk, "Leadership of Mennonite Missions, 1945–1985," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 8 (2000): 52–53.

out *for* others, but as something discerned and lived out *with* others. In the PIPKA model, authority is not centralized in sending agencies but relocated within the local church, thereby affirming its theological and contextual agency.

This shift represents more than an organizational adjustment; it signals a fundamental reorientation of power and identity in mission. The traditional “classical” mission model, shaped by colonial assumptions, positioned Western agencies as the primary agents of initiative and control. By contrast, PIPKA embodies a vision of mission as mutual participation within the body of Christ, where no single group claims superiority. The role of external partners is reframed not as superior or even savior, but as co-laborers who accompany and support locally initiated vision.

Such a model challenges deeply embedded habits of leadership that associate responsibility with control, and instead invites a posture of trust, humility, and relinquishment.

Shenk presents the formal agreement between PIPKA and the Mennonite Brethren Board of Mission (BOMAS) in the formation of the Missionary Training Center in Jakarta. The agreement appears in full within Shenk’s essay (pp. 85–95 of this volume), and can be summarized as follows:

1. We are members of the same family.
2. As partners, we are not simply shareholders, but family members.
3. Diversity and differences do not mean disunity.
4. Our goal in partnership is to strengthen local churches to grow and multiply.
5. All program decisions are to be made on the field to achieve PIPKA’s goals.

Shenk also noted that the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions likewise joined with PIPKA through sending two missionary couples to work in church development in Kalimantan. This was another example of what collaboration in a mutual way looks like.⁴

Through this Missionary Training Center, PIPKA began to recruit and send many Indonesian church planters and evangelists to Sumatra, Kalimantan, Bali, Sulawesi, and several other regions in Indonesia. During my university studies in Jakarta (1995–1999), I recall that my pastor at GKMI Anugerah Jakarta, Rev. Yesaya Abdi, encouraged me to visit PIPKA’s churches in Lampung during my semester break. Following his suggestion, I traveled to Lampung and stayed with the late Rev. Ishak Ngongo and his family. Rev. Ngongo was among the early church planters sent by PIPKA, along with Rev. Sulihanto and others. During my visit in 1997, I had the opportunity to meet several of these PIPKA church planters and learn firsthand about their ministry.

4 Ibid.

This experience became a foundational moment in my missional formation, shaping my understanding of PIPKA's work and my participation in God's mission in a practical way. Rev. Ngongo invited me to preach in one of the churches he had planted, an opportunity that stretched me beyond my training as a student of computerized accounting and taught me to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit in ministry.⁵

Dale Warkentin, one of the missionaries from BOMAS who was involved in this Missionary Training Center formation, has described a Spirit-led revival among Indonesian Mennonites characterized by indigenous leadership, contextual spirituality, lay participation, and rapid mission expansion through PIPKA.⁶ I believe one of the biggest lessons I learned from that trip was how God can use ordinary people like Rev. Ishak Ngongo and many others, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to share the good news among people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, transforming lives. The mutual partnership between PIPKA and BOMAS in forming the Missionary Training Center was answering the prayer of the founders, Herman Tan, Andreas Setiawan, and Theophilus Muryadi, to take the gospel outside of the Muria mountain in Central Java; that is, outside of "Jerusalem." Herman Tann, in "The Story of PIPKA," wrote,

PIPKA was meant to be an extension and channel of the Muria Synod to spread the Gospel and plant churches not only in Indonesia but also in the world. PIPKA broke down the traditional and colonial church policy of geographical and ethnic boundaries. The Muria (Mennonite) Church found its global tasks to evangelize all nations and opened the door for global relationships and partnerships with its fellow Anabaptist/Mennonite believers and institutions.⁷

For contemporary mission leaders, the significance of this model lies not only in its structural implications but also in its theological depth. Partnership, in this sense, is not merely a pragmatic strategy for effectiveness; it is an expression of ecclesial unity and shared discipleship. The PIPKA model calls leaders to reimagine mission as a relational and reciprocal process, rooted in the recognition that God's work is already present within local contexts. In doing so, it offers a more faithful and sustainable paradigm for global mission, one that honors the dignity, voice, and leadership of local communities while redefining the vocation of those who come alongside them.

5 See Andi O. Santoso, "From Ordinary to History Maker," *Mennonite World Conference*, March 8, 2019, <https://mwc-cmm.org/en/stories/ordinary-history-maker/>.

6 Dale Warkentin, "Reports of Renewal: Revival Among the Mennonites of Indonesia," *Direction* 8, no. 4 (1979): 18–19.

7 Herman Tann, "The Story of PIPKA: I Will Build My Church," paper presented at the Mennonite World Conference, Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 24–29, 1990, 5.

Conclusion

The story of PIPKA's founders and early church planters reveals a distinctive pattern of missional leadership that is both locally rooted and globally connected. This leadership is not defined primarily by position or institutional power, but by a deep dependence on the Holy Spirit, a commitment to relational partnership, and the courage to cross cultural, geographical, and structural boundaries.

Such Spirit-led leadership is embedded in the DNA of PIPKA and expressed in its daily practices: preaching the good news, facilitating communal discernment, building relationships across barriers, engaging diverse cultures, carrying administrative responsibilities with integrity, and creating bridges between communities. It is a form of leadership marked by humility, mutuality, and openness to learning from others, qualities that have enabled PIPKA not only to grow locally but also to engage meaningfully with the global church, including partners in the Global North.

My own journey, from East Java to Central Java, and from Indonesia to the wider global church, reflects this broader movement "from the East to the West and from everywhere to everywhere." It demonstrates that mission today is no longer unidirectional, but multilateral, shaped by reciprocal relationships and shared participation in God's work. This is the vision of missional leadership today: a Spirit-led, globally interconnected, and locally embodied participation in God's mission, where all are invited to the table, and all are transformed.

Book Reviews

Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun, *Building Mennonite Belonging: Toward an Intercultural Church*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, Quebec, 2025. 163 pp. \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-2280-2389-0.

I experienced a Mennonite church for the first time with a group of my classmates at Goshen College (Goshen, Indiana). We were in the early days of our inaugural semester, and one local congregation extended a generous invitation of Sunday worship and lunch to new college students. Church members enthusiastically welcomed us almost as soon as we walked through the door. One woman warmly greeted each student individually, asking our names and hometowns. I was surprised by the number of times she discovered that one of my classmates was related to someone she knew. These personal connections led to follow-up invitations to church activities. When I introduced myself, she looked puzzled and said, "I didn't know that Mennonites in that area had your last name." I responded, "I don't know about that. This is my first time at a Mennonite church." She politely smiled and moved on to the next student. As far as I could tell at the time, being outside the Mennonite fold apparently meant that I did not qualify for a follow-up invitation to her church.

Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun takes up the problem presented by experiences like mine in *Building Mennonite Belonging: Toward An Intercultural Church*. A constellation of family networks and ethnic histories function to uphold an insular Mennonite identity, often found to be impenetrable even by the most sincere adherents to Mennonite faith convictions. Can anyone be a Mennonite? Or does the Mennonite identity exclusively belong to an ethnic group? Kim Sun admits that "if Mennonites are simply an ethnic group and not a religious community, then there is no need to have this discussion" (117). He proposes, instead, an intercultural Mennonite church centered on faith in which a diversity of cultural groups engage in mutual relationships based in love and justice. The strength of Kim Sun's proposal is that he deals with the problem of insularity as an insider. His introduction begins clearly: "I am a Mennonite" (3). In fact, most of the sources that he draws from in *Building Mennonite Belonging* are other Mennonites. His book is not a depersonalized, distant criticism of the church, but rather a call to transformation from within.

Interculturality, as Kim Sun describes it, is a vision of shalom or *convivencia* (from Spanish, literally "co-living"). His definition emphasizes engagements across cultural groups that seek a just and peaceful society. The biblical theme of shalom describes the totality of cosmic well-being and harmony to which these

kinds of intercultural engagements contribute. Borrowing the word *convivencia* from philosophers and theologians in Latin America, Kim Sun describes close, mutual relationships that exist despite and by virtue of tension. Cultural groups do not arrive at engagements in a vacuum of context. Rather, cross-cultural interactions are always colored by the consequences of history. Similar proposals, like Canadian multiculturalism, do not adequately address asymmetries of power and the legacies of colonialism and racism. So-called “ethnic Mennonites,” despite their historical experiences of exclusion and violence, largely benefit from the colonial project in the Canadian context. Their “ethnic myopia and lax racial awareness” (115) are barriers to arriving at true interculturality. For these reasons, Kim Sun qualifies his vision for the church as a “critical interculturality” (9), calling for a critical evaluation of the historical and social context in which intercultural engagements occur.

Building Mennonite Belonging organizes its discussion of Mennonite ecclesiology by identifying how the church is imagined theologically as the “believed church,” and how the church operates sociologically as the “experienced church” (15). Kim Sun introduces a variety of Mennonite approaches to help readers understand the church theologically, and then he surveys studies of Mennonite peoplehood in Canada. After laying out a framework of critical interculturality, he returns to Mennonite ecclesiology to reevaluate common approaches and to propose practical engagements. For Kim Sun, the Mennonite emphasis on Christocentrism has contributed to the problem of insularity. He carefully explains how the Mennonite insistence on a plain reading of Jesus in scripture can ignore the cultural bias of interpretation, and furthermore contribute to the Mennonite tendency of identifying true followers of Jesus against the world. Without suggesting that Mennonites abandon their characteristic hermeneutics, Kim Sun proposes that Jesus-centered practices like baptism and the Lord’s Supper can become opportunities for unity and belonging across cultures.

Kim Sun holds that Mennonite theology and history already contain a multitude of resources that make critical interculturality a possibility for the church. He offers the theo-ethical norms of hospitality, love and justice, and mutuality—each rooted in Mennonite values and aspiring to interculturality—as ideals for the Mennonite church in Canada. Although he writes from and for this particular context, his proposal will certainly find resonance among Mennonites across North America who long for the transformation of an insular church. Again, Kim Sun writes as a Mennonite insider who sees the prophetic and missional potential of his own tradition. This is probably why I so deeply appreciate his book. Despite the off-putting experience that I had during my first visit to a Mennonite church, I can now say with Kim Sun that “I am a Mennonite.” In fact, it was an African American Mennonite pastor in Philadelphia who first told me that I could be a Mennonite. Then, it was a Hispanic Mennonite congregation in South Texas that first welcomed me into membership. Ironically, it was non-ethnic

Mennonites who invited me into the fold. (This was despite my upbringing in a German-Lutheran home culture, which is not so different from the variety of Mennonite culture that I initially found to be difficult to access.) I now serve as the pastor of a multilingual Mennonite church that is seeking the kind of intercultural vision that Kim Sun articulates in *Building Mennonite Belonging*. My congregation has experienced the tension of cultural difference, and at times has even questioned the compatibility of Mennonite tradition with interculturality. Can Mennonite faith express itself beyond the cultural and ethnic heritage that has carried it across time and place? Kim Sun convincingly demonstrates that the answer is yes.

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Peter M. Sensenig, *Good Guestwork*, Santos Books, Elizabethtown, PA, 2025. 194 pp. \$24.99. ISBN: 979-8-9994186-5-4.

In an era marked by global tensions and deepening religious divides, *Good Guestwork* by Peter M. Sensenig offers a timely and thoughtful contribution to conversations about Christian-Muslim relationships. The book addresses the tensions that arise from the persistent lack of meaningful interaction between Muslims and other faith communities, urging readers to move beyond superficial tolerance toward a posture of genuine listening. Sensenig's central argument is that the "spiritual vitality of the church depends upon building relationships with Muslims" (5).

My perspective on these themes is deeply personal, rooted in my experience growing up in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation. Despite living in close proximity, it is still uncommon for people to be open about their personal beliefs. Misunderstandings often run deep, and what I would call "immature" conversations—those shaped by defensiveness rather than a desire to understand—can easily worsen relationships rather than heal them. Sensenig describes this dynamic as a kind of "sibling rivalry" (11). Muslims and Christians, he writes, "fight like siblings" because they share theological roots and physical space, yet political competition and historical tensions "erode trust that has been built" (12–13).

This book is important because it helps us understand how to approach these relationships with wisdom and humility. Sensenig argues that Christians must move away from "territoriality"—the impulse to control religious or cultural space—and instead learn to become "guests and hosts of one another" in the "great world house" God created (6, 15–16). His emphasis on relational presence resonated with my own experiences. I recall a high school friend who was strongly opposed to Christianity. We debated frequently, yet somehow managed

to remain friends. Years later he apologized for his earlier hostility and eventually became a Christian through his own journey of faith. While his decision was his own, I believe the memory of our friendship created a foundation that allowed the possibility of change. As Sensenig observes, “stories come first” because we encounter each other first as neighbors (17).

Reading *Good Guestwork* also reminded me of a trip I took in 2003 to Indonesia accompanying David W. and Grace Shenk. Indonesia has experienced painful episodes of religious violence, including extremist attacks. Yet in my experience, many conflicts grow not simply from theology but from accumulated wounds, misunderstandings, and fear. Sensenig addresses this dynamic by encouraging readers to move from focusing on “your pain” to recognizing “the pain”—understanding that individual suffering is part of humanity’s shared brokenness (51). Within this framework, Christians are called to respond not with retaliation but with forgiveness and compassion, embodying Christ’s message even amid conflict.

A central theme of the book is that our life example is often the first gospel others encounter. Sensenig writes that unless Christians “become the analogy of the incarnation” by loving people concretely, Jesus Christ remains an abstraction (19, 25). He illustrates this through the example of David W. Shenk, who modeled “House Rule #2”—“Do not look down on a fellow guest”—even when he was once “confronted at a mosque” by individuals “trashing the Bible” (148). While that particular incident is described in the book, I witnessed a similar spirit of humility during David’s 2003 visit to Indonesia. As I accompanied him to dialogues with students and community leaders, I observed firsthand how respectful relationships opened doors for meaningful conversation. These encounters reinforced the book’s central insight: When Christians open their hearts and learn to love their Muslim neighbors as Jesus does, genuine relationships can become the doorway through which the good news of salvation is heard.

The book also offers a valuable critique of Western media portrayals of the Muslim world. News coverage often emphasizes political turmoil and violence while neglecting stories of reconciliation and friendship. In Indonesia, I observed that alongside conflict there also exists a deep yearning for peaceful coexistence. Sensenig notes that these quieter stories of reconciliation are often overlooked, even though they may ultimately shape the future of interreligious relationships more than the conflicts themselves (35, 37).

Sensenig further introduces the idea of “peace cells,” small communities of Christians intentionally cultivating relationships across religious boundaries (21). These communities are particularly significant in places where Christians live as a minority and therefore feel the urgency of building transformed relationships. One example highlighted in the book is Indonesian Mennonite pastor Paulus Hartono, who repeatedly “knocked on the doors of extremists” and discovered that through Christ even former enemies could become “good neighbors” (43, 82).

Ultimately, *Good Guestwork* reminds readers that Jesus himself often lived and ministered as a guest. Much of his most transformative work took place in the homes of others, where hospitality and vulnerability created space for God's work (54). By embracing this posture and becoming what Sensenig calls "vulnerable strangers," Christians may create opportunities for genuine reconciliation (25). The book therefore invites the church to practice what the author calls a "stranger faith"—one that moves into the neighborhood and says "yes" to the religious other (52).

For readers seeking guidance on how to love their neighbors in a world marked by religious conflict, *Good Guestwork* offers both theological insight and practical wisdom. The stories and reflections in its pages remind us that reconciliation is not merely an ideal but a lived possibility. As the experiences I have witnessed in Indonesia demonstrate, even those who once saw one another as enemies may one day find themselves sitting together at the table of the Great Host.

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